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Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, Volume XI. Conferences to the Congregation of the Mission vol. 1

Vincent de Paul

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SAINT
VINCENT DE PAUL

CONFERENCES
TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

VOLUME XI



Vincent Desaul /

Copy of the painting by Simon François de Tours 1660,
preserved at Moutiers-Saint-Jean (France)

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

CORRESPONDENCE
CONFERENCES, DOCUMENTS

II

CONFERENCES

VOLUME XI

NEWLY TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND ANNOTATED

FROM THE 1923 EDITION

OF

PIERRE COSTE, C.M.



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Vicar General, Archdiocese of Baltimore

February 26, 2008

To

THE ORGANIZERS

OF

THE INTERNATIONAL FORMATION CENTER (CIF)

In recognition of their efforts to facilitate a return to the sources by offering programs and experiences that encourage confreres to keep alive the fire of knowledge, love, and appreciation of Saint Vincent de Paul in living the spirit and charism today.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE FRENCH EDITION

If care had been taken to collect and preserve all the conferences of Saint Vincent to his confreres at the Collège des Bons-Enfants¹ or at Saint-Lazare,² ten thick volumes could not contain them. He spoke to them often: every Friday, at Chapter in the morning and at the conference in the evening; on Sundays, Wednesdays, and feast days; and at Repetition of Prayer.³ The practice of virtue, the duties

¹On March 1, 1624, Jean-François de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, turned over to Saint Vincent the direction of the Collège des Bons-Enfants so that he might have a place to lodge priests wishing to join him in giving missions in the country. Situated near the Porte Saint-Victor, on the site of the building now standing on the corner of rue des Écoles and rue Cardinal-Lemoine, this collège, nearly three hundred years old, was one of the oldest of the University of Paris. It was not a teaching center, but simply a hostel in which students were provided with shelter and sleeping quarters.

²Saint-Lazare was outside the city limits of Paris. At its greatest extent, the buildings and enclosure covered a vast quadrangle which today is encompassed by rue du Paradis, rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis, boulevard de la Chapelle, and rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière. (Cf. Jean Parrang, "Saint-Lazare" in *Petites Annales de S. Vincent de Paul*, 1903, pp. 13-30.) In his petition to Pope Urban VIII (cf. I, 248-57), Saint Vincent gives a detailed description of the situation of Saint-Lazare in 1634.

Adrien Le Bon, Canon Regular of Saint Augustine and Prior of Saint-Lazare, offered the priory to Saint Vincent. The generous offer alarmed the saint who refused it—several times—until a trusted advisor, André Duval, convinced him of the wisdom of this agreement. The contract was signed on January 7, 1632 (cf. XIIIa, 263). The following day Saint Vincent and his men went to live at Saint-Lazare. Le Bon also donated a number of farms for the support of the Congregation.

When references to other volumes of this series are given, the number of the volume will be given in bold Roman numerals, the page in italics, and, if applicable, the number of the footnote preceded by "n.", e.g., (cf. V, 243, n. 4). Where there is reference to another conference in vols. XI-XII, the reference will be given in the form used in the following example: (cf. XI, Conf. 11).

³Repetition of Prayer was a practice dear to Saint Vincent. Two or three times a week, before the end of the meditation made in church, he asked three or four confreres to give an account of their meditation: judgments, inspirations, resolutions, or a reflection that resulted from pondering the topic assigned for meditation. In instituting this exercise, which lasted ten to fifteen minutes, Saint Vincent envisaged three results: to verify the existence of a prayer life and keep an eye on its development; to stimulate and nourish meditation; and to direct the Community at a moment where it was particularly open to supernatural influences. The collection mentioned here contains a certain number of Repetitions whose dates were established by means of a particular day of the week. François Lefort, who entered the Congregation of the Mission on July 14, 1657, testified at the Process of Beatification for Saint Vincent that the saint himself made Repetition every Sunday and Wednesday and gave a conference every Friday. In thirty-five years Saint Vincent probably presided over some two thousand Repetitions of Prayer. We have the text for only fifty-two of these, dated for the most part from the years 1655-57.

of their state, the explanation of the Rules, and the lessons to be drawn from the feast days of the year were the usual subjects of his talks. To these he added recommendations he judged useful and news that was of interest to the Company, especially news of distant missions such as Scotland, the Hebrides, Poland, Barbary, and Madagascar. The words issuing from his mouth came from the abundance of his heart, and he did not notice that time was passing. When the clock indicated that it was time to conclude, a surprised Vincent de Paul still had a great deal to say. He apologized for being so loquacious, adding that he was about to conclude, and he did, in fact, come to a close, even if he sometimes allowed himself to get carried away by what he was saying and went far beyond the appointed time (cf. **XI**, Confs. 134 and 161).

He didn't try to find the right thoughts or words; everything flowed from his heart. His recommendations to the confreres to be simple in their preaching were much more easily accepted when he put his own advice into practice. He wasn't one of those who speak "in a declamatory tone that goes way over people's heads."

In these familiar talks, he sometimes interrupted himself to question his confreres or to get some information or detail from them. In one conference he was saying, "We've seen ancient philosophers, who disdained wealth to a very high degree, even though they were pagans; look at one of them—I forget his name. . . . Don't you remember it, M. de la Fosse?"⁴ No one in the group knew pagan antiquity as

⁴Jacques de la Fosse, born in Paris on November 25, 1621, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 8, 1640, took his vows on April 7, 1643, and was ordained a priest in September 1648. Immediately after his ordination, Saint Vincent entrusted to him the humanities at Saint-Charles Seminary. He "often reenacted there Christian tragedies," wrote Pierre Collet (*La vie de St. Vincent de Paul* [2 vols., Nancy: A. Leseure, 1748], vol. I, p. 326), "whose spirit and sublimity drew the applause of connoisseurs in Paris." In 1656 he went to Marseilles, where he served in turn as missionary and seminary professor. Two years later he was sent to Troyes. He died in Sedan on April 30, 1674. De la Fosse was as generous as he was capricious, easily becoming enthusiastic and just as easily becoming discouraged. Several times he almost left the Company; only Saint Vincent's paternal encouragement kept him from doing so. His writings, all in Latin, made a name for him among the Latinists of the seventeenth century. Collet says he was "an orator, philosopher, and theologian all in one, and such a great poet that Santeuil considered him his rival and sometimes his master" (*ibid.*, vol. I, p. 277). Dom Calmet added: "In general, there is great passion and many noble, generous thoughts in de la Fosse's poetry, but his penchant for mythology, even in his sacred verses, sometimes renders them obscure because of his unusual expressions and frequent allusions to fable." (Cf. Augustin Calmet, *Bibliothèque*

well as Jacques de la Fosse. Immediately the latter answered, "It was Diogenes," but Saint Vincent wasn't convinced and continued, "All right then, Diogenes, if he's the one." (Cf. Conf. 110)

Another time, the saint gave the gist of a scriptural reference but forgot the exact wording. "How does that go?" he asked. "Does anyone remember?" It was Antoine Portail⁵ who stood up and gave the answer.

Vincent de Paul loved to display his "ignorance"; he took as much joy in it as others do in displaying their knowledge. One day, giving an interpretation of these words of the Psalmist, *Ut jumentum factus sum apud te*,⁶ he fumbled on the translation, unsure whether *jumentum* was masculine or feminine. Anyone else would have let it go; that was easily done; but not he; he was happy to have a fresh opportunity to humble himself. "I've acted with God and men like a

lorraine [Nancy: A. Leseure, 1751], p. 376.) His works are found in the Bibliothèque Nationale (MS. L 10.331, 11.365), in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (MS. 1137, 1138), and in the Bibliothèque Mazarine (MS. 3910-19, 4312, imp. 10.877). See also [Édouard Rosset, C.M.] *Notices bibliographiques sur les écrivains de la Congrégation de la Mission* (Angoulême: J.-B. Baillarger, 1878).

⁵ Antoine Portail, born in Beaucaire (Gard) on November 22, 1590, came to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. He met Saint Vincent there around 1612 and became devoted to him. From the time of his ordination (1622) until his death in 1660, he was the auxiliary of the saint. The latter assigned him to the service of the galley convicts, received him as the first member of his new Congregation, initiated him into the ministry of the missions and the work of the ordinands, chose him as First Assistant in 1642, and entrusted to him the direction of the Daughters of Charity. In 1646 Portail left Paris to make visitations of the houses of the Congregation. He began in the west of France, then went south, crossed into Italy, and did not return to Saint-Lazare until September 1649. Except for a fairly long absence in 1655, he hardly ever left the Motherhouse again and died on February 14, 1660, after an illness of nine days. (Cf. *Notices sur les prêtres, clercs et frères défunts de la Congrégation de la Mission* [10 vols. in two series, Paris: Dumoulin, 1881-1911], vol. I, pp. 1-94. This text is henceforth cited as *Notices*.)

⁶ *I was like a brute beast in your presence*. Cf. Ps 73:22-23. (NAB)

Translations of scripture quotations are usually taken from the *New American Bible* (NAB), unless a passage cannot be found in that edition or a more suitable rendering of the quote is found in the *Douay-Rheims Bible* (D-R B). Where there are variations in the numbering of the psalms in these two editions, both versions may be cited. Saint Vincent referred to Scripture innumerable times; occasionally he gives an incorrect rendition or attributes the passage to the wrong person. This edition does not give references for all the allusions, many of which are already familiar to the reader. For further study of Saint Vincent's use of Scripture, see the following studies: Warren Dicharry, C.M., "Saint Vincent and Sacred Scripture," *Vincentian Heritage*, VII, no. 2, 1989, 137-49; Maurice Vansteenkiste, C.M., "Les Règles Communes et la Bible, Citations explicites, implicites, et réminiscences," *CD-ROM Documents vincentiens, Ecrits et Images*, Claude Lautissier, C.M., Paris 2002; and François Garner, "Enchiridion Spirituale Sancte Vincenti a Paulo IV: Textes Bibliques Cités par Saint Vincent," *Vincentiana*, 23 (1979): 214-19, among others.

mule—male or female,” he said. “I’m so stupid that I don’t know whether to make ‘mule’ masculine or feminine.” It would be difficult to find such amiable simplicity joined to such great humility.

To simplicity was added warmth, a contagious warmth that moved hearts deeply because it flowed from a heart totally permeated with the truths he was proclaiming—from the heart of a saint. Nothing serves the interest of an orator better than profound conviction. Two words coming from his mouth often produced a greater effect than a long discourse. Just by using the interjections so familiar to him, such as “*O Jésus! mon Dieu! O Sauveur!*” Saint Vincent found the way to affect his listeners, so animated were the tone of his voice and his facial expressions.

As one of the best examples of his eloquence—and rightly so—the following passage, taken from one of his conferences, has been noted: “I leave you to ponder, my dear confreres, the great danger our unfortunate confrere the Consul of Algiers and so many poor French Christian slaves are in.... *O Sauveur! O mon Sauveur!* What will become of those poor men? What will they do? But what will our poor confrere do, this man who left his country, his region, his relatives, and his birthplace, where he could be leading an easy life? Yet, he abandoned all that for God, to serve God and to assist his neighbor, that is, those poor slaves!

I’m talking about M. Bourdaise,⁷ my dear confreres, M. Bourdaise, who is so far away and all alone, and who, as you’ve heard, has brought forth in Jesus Christ with such trouble and care so many of those poor natives of the country in which he now is. Let’s also pray for him. M. Bourdaise, are you still alive or not? If you are, may it please God to will to preserve your life! If you’re in heaven, pray for us.”

“Shouldn’t a passage like this,” writes Abbé Brémond,⁸ “be familiar to all of us from our secondary school days? Isn’t it worthy of

⁷Toussaint Bourdaise, born in Blois (Loir-et-Cher) in 1618, entered the Internal Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on October 6, 1645, and took his vows there on October 7, 1647. He was ordained a priest in 1651, even though his talent and knowledge had been questioned a number of times (cf. XI, no. 177). In 1654 he was sent to Madagascar, where he died on June 25, 1657. Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 180-214).

⁸Abbé Henri Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu’à nos jours* (10 vols., Paris: Bloud, 1916-32), vol. III, p. 234.

being compared to the three wonders of the genre: David weeping for Jonathan, *Montes Gelboe* ...;⁹ Virgil;¹⁰ and Saint Bernard's funeral oration for his brother?"

No one escaped the seduction of his words. The Ladies of Charity and the Priests of the Tuesday Conferences¹¹ were as captivated as the Daughters of Charity and the Missioners. People like to cite as a model of eloquence what he said one day regarding the foundlings in one of his talks to the Ladies, who were looking after them (cf. **XIIIb**, Doc. 196, pp. 423-24). We know all the things he obtained from them for his good works. We are familiar with these words from the letter Bossuet¹² wrote to Pope Clement XI, "When

⁹Cf. 2 Sm 1. (NAB)

¹⁰Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro), *Aeneid*, bk. VI, "Funeral Panegyric of Young Marcellus": *Heu, miserande puer, si qua fata aspera rumpas, tu Marcellus eris.* (Alas, pitiable boy—if only you might break your miserable fate, you are to be Marcellus.)

¹¹The meetings known as the Tuesday Conferences began on June 13, 1633, as an outgrowth of the retreats for ordinands. They were to serve the clerical and spiritual development of priests selected for their proven holiness and learning. By the rules devised at the initial organizational meetings (cf. **XIIIa**, 140), the members committed themselves to meet every Tuesday at Saint-Lazare or at the Bons-Enfants "to honor the life of Christ, the Eternal Priest"; to celebrate daily Mass and confess once a week to a regular confessor; to make a spiritual retreat annually; to spend some time each day in mental prayer and the Divine Office; to read the New Testament; to make an examination of conscience; to attend the funerals of members; and to offer three Masses for the souls of the deceased.

They met at three o'clock in the afternoon from All Saints' Day to Easter, and at three-thirty from Easter to All Saints', beginning with the *Veni, Creator*, followed by discussion on the topic proposed at the previous meeting. In his letters and conferences, Saint Vincent mentions some of these topics suitable for priests, such as the Beatitudes, the sanctification of Lent, modesty, humility, the spirit of poverty in the use of ecclesiastical goods, and censures. Members also gave reports on the works undertaken: confession for the sick at the Hôtel-Dieu, exhortations for prisoners, missions, etc.

The Superior of the Congregation of the Mission or his delegate directed the Conferences at Saint-Lazare, which were attended by more than 250 priests during Saint Vincent's lifetime. Of these priests, twenty-two became Bishops. Similar conferences, modeled on those of Saint-Lazare, were organized in dioceses throughout France and Italy.

¹²Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Bishop, preacher, and author, was born in Dijon on September 27, 1627, into a family whose ancestors on both sides had occupied judicial posts in France for over half a century. He pursued a classical education at the Collège de Navarre, where he came under the influence of Vincent de Paul, whose guidance prepared him for the priesthood, which he received on March 18, 1652. He was a Canon of the Cathedral Chapter of Metz and for seven years was engaged in preaching, discussions with the Protestants, and study of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. In 1659 he went to Paris on Chapter business and was persuaded by Saint Vincent and the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria, to remain there as a preacher. In 1670 he was consecrated Bishop of Condom, but had to resign later that year, when he was named tutor and guardian for the Dauphin. He wrote a number of works for the latter, of which he considered the most important his "philosophy of history": *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*. After the

we listened attentively to him speaking at a certain conference (cf. **XI**, Conf. 93), we felt these words of the Apostle fulfilled in him, ‘If anyone speaks, let his words be like the words of God.’ ”¹³

What edified people more than anything in the saintly priest’s conferences was his humility in speaking of himself. No matter what the topic, he always found the means of demeaning himself before his Community. To hear him talk, no one had merited the wrath of God more than he did because no one had made poorer use of His graces.

At Repetition of Prayer on June 26, 1642, a coadjutor Brother was so naive as to say that he was ashamed for profiting so little by the good examples of M. Vincent and the many wonderful things he saw in him. The good saint let him go on, then, speaking in his turn, said, “Brother, it’s a practice among us never to praise anyone in his presence,” and added that he was indeed a wonder, but a wonder of malice worse than the devil, that he had merited hell a hundred times over, and that there was no exaggeration in what he was saying.

To find matter for humbling himself, Saint Vincent went back to the distant past and his last family visit, and even to the years when, as a child, he tended his parents’ flocks and accompanied his father, who was “poorly dressed and had a slight limp,” to Dax. How many times did he not call himself a poor pig-keeper or a fourth level student! How often did he not mention the lowly social condition of his parents and their extreme poverty! Even his infirmities and the needs stemming from them gave him occasion to speak ill of himself. “*O mon Sauveur!*” he said one day in a conference on poverty, “How can I talk about that, I who am so wretched and who used to have a horse and a carriage, and now have a bedroom with a fireplace, a nicely curtained bed, and a Brother to stay with me, and am so well cared for that I lack nothing! What scandal I give to the Company by

Dauphin’s marriage in 1681, Bossuet was named Bishop of Meaux, but continued to have great influence at Court, especially on Louis XIV’s religio-political policy with regard to the Protestants (revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685). It was he who inspired the promulgation of the Gallican Principles in 1682, which he also wrote by order of the Assembly of the Clergy of France. He was involved in the disputes both with the Jansenists and the Quietists of Fénelon. Bossuet died on April 12, 1704.

¹³Cf. 1 Pt 4:11. (NAB)

the abuse I've made of the vow of poverty in all these and other similar things! For this I ask pardon of God and of the Company, which I entreat to bear with me in my old age. May God grant me the grace to correct myself, now that I have reached this age, and, as far as possible, to rid me of all those things!" The humble old man had gone on his knees to say these words and, as was the custom, the Community did the same. Is there a more beautiful and more touching sight, a stronger and more persuasive eloquence?

The naturalness of his gestures gave the saint's words a greater hold on his audience, as his contemporaries had remarked. In his conference of December 6, 1658, he warns his men against those lazy persons who, after his death, will try to divert the Company from its original works. He asks himself what sort of men these will be, and he replies, "They'll be pampered men," and Bro. Ducournau¹⁴ notes that, as he said this, "he folded his arms, mimicking the lazy ones." He then continues, accompanying those words with hand gestures, movements of his head, and a disdainful inflection of his voice, which spoke louder than the words themselves, "They'll be men who have a limited perspective, who confine their outlook and their plans to a certain circle, in which they enclose themselves as on one spot; they don't want to leave it; and if anyone shows them something outside of it, and they draw nearer to consider it, they immediately go back into their center like snails in their shells." This couldn't be better stated.

Like many of his fellow countrymen from the Midi,¹⁵ didn't the saint sometimes go beyond the limits allowed by treatises on eloquence? It's possible. One day he apologized to the Community for

¹⁴Bertrand Ducournau, born in Amou (Landes) in 1614, entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother on July 28, 1644, and took his vows on October 9, 1646. He had fine penmanship and common sense and, from the various positions he had occupied in the world, including that of a professional secretary, had learned to be shrewd, frank, and reliable in business affairs. Saint Vincent, therefore, made him his secretary in 1645. By his devotion, tact, and love of work, this good Brother rendered inestimable services to Saint Vincent and his Congregation. It can be said that, through his preparation of materials and his personal notes, he contributed more than Abelly himself to the first biography of Saint Vincent. Bro. Ducournau remained as secretary to the Superiors General René Almérás and Edme Jolly, and was Archivist of Saint-Lazare. He died in Paris on January 3, 1677. Bro. Pierre Chollier, his assistant in the secretariat, wrote his biography, which is found in *Notices*, vol. I, pp. 377ff.

¹⁵The South of France.

being too animated. “Last Friday, I gave reason for scandal to the Company by shouting so loudly and clapping my hands; it seemed like I was annoyed with someone; that’s why I ask pardon of the Company for it.” (Cf. **XI**, Conf. 133.)

Even though the Friday conference was scheduled at a late hour, after evening meditation, the saint was not always free to be there from the beginning. Sometimes he had one of his men write down what he thought was noteworthy in what those who were questioned had to say.

Repetition of Prayer took place in the church. It began most likely before the conclusion of the usual time for meditation. Saint Vincent would have the Company gather around him and would question three or four members of the Community, regardless of their category, after which he would speak. He thanked God for the good thoughts given to those who had just spoken, pointing out charitably—sometimes forcefully—anything erroneous in their thinking, inaccurate in what they said, or faulty in their manner of making their meditation, helping them to realize the seriousness of the failings they had acknowledged. Sometimes, going even further, he reminded them of more weighty faults about which they had kept a discreet silence.

Unless there was a serious reason, very rarely did anyone excuse himself from Repetition. The saint sternly humbled those who were guilty of this negligence so that they would not give this bad example to the Community again. At the end of Repetition, the saint would ask for prayers for those who had requested this grace; then a few Missioners—this was not obligatory—would accuse themselves of a recent fault.

It was during Repetition of Prayer that the saint preferred to give his recommendations. When he felt it his duty to give a reprimand, and deemed that the rebuke would be more successful if this was done before the Community, nothing stopped him, neither the position of the person being reproved,¹⁶ the nature of the reproach, nor

¹⁶For example, the penance imposed on Lambert aux Couteaux, his Assistant, in the presence of the whole Community. (Cf. Louis Abelly, *La vie du Vénérable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul* [Paris: F. Lambert, 1664], bk. III, chap. XIV, p. 236.)

the thought of the shame the guilty man was going to experience. More than once, he humbled priests in front of the coadjutor Brothers and young clerics, or publicly admonished those who had so far forgotten themselves as to commit the fault of drinking to excess or of having no scruples about going into the rooms of others, even of retreatants.

So that the recommendation might be more effective, he sometimes gave a penance: depriving the man of wine, making him abstain from Holy Communion, forbidding him to offer Mass, or even extending his time in the seminary. The seminarian who gave himself permission to go to a conference despite his Director's prohibition must have had a very unpleasant surprise when he heard Saint Vincent, in front of all the members of the Community, add six months to his time of probation; for, on that particular day, contrary to his usual way of acting, the holy Founder kept in the church until the end of Repetition those men who had some reason to leave sooner. The man to whom the reprimand was being given knelt down and stayed in that position until the end of the admonition. If the person remained standing, the saint would remind him of the customary practice.

To make his admonitions more acceptable, Saint Vincent would begin by accusing himself. "O Brother, shall I say this?" he exclaimed at Repetition of Prayer on August 24, 1655. "*O Sauveur!*

Lambert aux Couteaux, born in Fossemanant (Somme), in 1606, had been a member of the Congregation of the Mission since August 1629. In the early 1630s he preached in the South of France with Robert de Sergis. He founded the house in Toul in 1635 and remained there as Superior until 1637. In January 1638 he began the establishment in Richelieu (Indre-et-Loire), where he was Pastor and Superior for four years. The General Assembly of 1642 named him Assistant to the Superior General. For a brief period he was Superior at the Bons-Enfants (1646-49), then at Saint-Charles Seminary. In 1650-51 he was again in Richelieu. The saint had such confidence in him that he had him make the visitation of Saint-Lazare. He sent him to render the same service to the Missioners in La Rose and Toul, as well as to the Sisters in Angers and Nantes.

Urged by Propaganda Fide in 1647 to designate someone as Coadjutor Bishop of Babylon, Saint Vincent could think of no one more worthy than Lambert aux Couteaux. In his response to Bishop Ingoli (cf. III, 168), he expressed himself as follows: "I must confess, Excellency, that losing this person is like plucking out one of my own eyes or cutting off my arm." The plan, however, did not materialize.

In 1651 the saint chose Lambert to establish the Congregation in Poland, where the Queen was asking for the Missioners. Everything had to be organized in that war-torn and plague-stricken country. Lambert's efforts were blessed by God but were short-lived because he died on January 31, 1653, a victim of his dedication to the plague-stricken. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. II, pp. 1-28.)

Can I really say it without blushing? Ah, Brother, I'm as guilty as you are because I failed to instruct you well. Can I really mention this? I have to swallow my shame as much as you do because I'm guilty of it.... I, a miserable sinner, am the cause of this disorder! And it wouldn't have happened except for the sins of this wretched man! O Brother, both of us should be ashamed of this"! On another day he said, "Alas, my dear confreres! What should distress us the most is not to see God draw His servants the saints to himself in this way, but rather to see that among our own priests there's someone along with me—yes, someone along with me—who gives scandal to the Company." And then he would begin to give the reprimands.

It would be interesting to have the detailed account of each of these conferences; we would see in them, together with a thousand edifying features, precious elements of the life of Saint Vincent and the history of his Congregation. Alas, almost nothing has been preserved! What we do have from conferences prior to 1655 covers only about sixty pages, most often simply synopses or short excerpts.

Perhaps no one understood Saint Vincent better than his devoted secretary Bro. Ducournau. He often bemoaned this indifference and did his best to try to fill in the gaps on his own, but he was very busy. In the end, on August 15, 1657, unable to stand it any longer, he sent a memo on the subject to René Almérás,¹⁷ Assistant of

¹⁷René Almérás the younger, nephew of Madame Goussault, was born in Paris on February 5, 1613, and was baptized the same day in Saint-Gervais Church. By coincidence Saint Louise was married in this church that very day. A Councillor in the Great Council at the age of twenty-four, Almérás left everything—family, position, and hopes—despite the opposition of his father (who was to follow him later) to enter the Congregation of the Mission, into which he was received on December 24, 1637. He was ordained a priest at Easter in 1639. Saint Vincent entrusted to him important positions, such as Assistant of the Motherhouse and Seminary Director. He appointed him to his council and often relied on his prudence to deal with lay persons in delicate matters; he also gave him charge of the retreatants. So much work ruined Almérás' health. The saint, convinced by personal experience that a change of air could improve one's health, sent him in 1646 to make the visitation of several houses in France and Italy. When he reached Rome, Almérás was notified that he had been appointed Superior of the house, where he remained until 1651. On his return to France he took over the direction of Saint-Charles Seminary. In 1654 he was involved in distributing relief to the poor people of Picardy and Champagne. He made visitations of some houses of the Congregation and was again named Assistant of the Motherhouse, in which position he remained until the death of Saint Vincent. He was also Visitor of the Province of Poitou. Almérás was in Richelieu when the saint, realizing that his own death was near, asked him to return to Paris immediately. Almérás was ill and was brought back on a stretcher but had the consolation of receiving a last blessing from the saint. Appointed

the Motherhouse. (The memo follows this introduction.) In it he pointed out the reasons for being faithful to collecting the discourses of Saint Vincent, refuted the objections that might be made, and suggested various means for achieving the desired goal. It was a delicate question. How could they manage to record the saint's words without arousing his attention? If someone—and with even greater reason, if some ones—of his listeners had begun to write things down while he was speaking, he certainly would have noticed. Even supposing that the reporters were well hidden behind the columns, the noise made by scratching on a piece of paper or turning a page would sooner or later have betrayed them. On the other hand, to reconstruct a conference from memory after the meeting also had its disadvantages. A long presentation cannot be remembered verbatim. There would, of necessity, be gaps and mistakes in the written text. To have recourse to the collective memory of all the priests in the house by meeting with them after the conference would hardly be feasible. The more practical thing was to give one or two of the listeners best suited for this work the job of recalling and transcribing the conference, giving them enough free time to do it. However, it was also necessary to find at Saint-Lazare willing persons with good memories, who would be able to interrupt their habitual work rather often, for the conferences occurred frequently. Bro. Ducournau volunteered for this, on condition that he be relieved of the duty of secretary. Since René Alméras really couldn't ask Saint Vincent to change his secretary without telling him why he was making that request, he asked Bro. Ducournau if he would collect the conferences of the holy priest, as far as time allowed him to do so.

The zealous secretary set to work; his biographer¹⁸ states that he collected enough material for two or three thick volumes. Ex-

Vicar-General by Saint Vincent, then elected Superior General by the Assembly of 1661, he governed wisely the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity until his death on September 2, 1672.

¹⁸Bro. Pierre Chollier, collaborator and later successor of Bro. Bertrand Ducournau. Besides his biography of Bro. Ducournau, he also wrote the life of Bro. Alexandre Véronne, the infirmarian at Saint-Lazare. He was the principal witness to appear before the ecclesiastical

cept those for the conference of May 30, 1659, on charity, Bro. Ducournau's manuscripts have all been lost. As far as we can judge, they were full of erasures and corrections, which seems only natural because it is hard work to reconstruct a text from memory, and those efforts do not produce good results at the first attempt.

Fortunately, the contents of Bro. Ducournau's manuscripts did not get lost with the papers. They have been preserved—although only in part—in two seventeenth- or eighteenth-century manuscripts, now in the Archives of the Congregation of the Mission. One of them contains a number of summaries or excerpts of conferences and Repetitions of Prayer; the other, a full-length copy of thirty-one conferences and the outline for a thirty-second.¹⁹ These two manuscripts complete one another; none of the talks that are in the second are in the first, and vice-versa.

The conferences of which we have the complete text were copied and recopied many times before the Revolution; for some of them we have two, three, or even four early copies, and they are all consistent with one another, except for a few rare insignificant differences of pure form.²⁰

Abelly²¹ had access to a more complete collection than ours. His *Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul* contains ex-

tribunal established to enquire into the virtue of Saint Vincent. His deposition was not only the longest, but also the most important, the most complete, and the best arranged.

¹⁹Conference on the Observance of the Rules.

²⁰ The manuscript volume of conferences which we are following for this publication has only an artificial unity owing to the binding. It is composed of as many distinct parts as there are conferences; the transcription is the work of six or seven copyists. To it are added two lists, written by Jean Gicquel and René Almérás, of conferences given at Saint-Lazare, and the diary of Saint Vincent's last days, written by Jean Gicquel.

²¹ Louis Abelly was born in Paris in 1604. From the earliest years of his priesthood he took part in Saint Vincent's apostolic works. The saint spoke so highly of him to François Fouquet, Bishop-elect of Bayonne, that the latter appointed him his Vicar-General. Abelly's stay in Bayonne was short-lived; he accepted a simple village parish near Paris, and shortly afterward (1644) was given charge of Saint-Josse parish in the capital, where he formed an ecclesiastical Community. He later became Director of the Sisters of the Cross (1650), chaplain of the General Hospital (1657), and Bishop of Rodez (1664). In 1666 he resigned his diocese for reasons of health and retired to Saint-Lazare, where he spent the last twenty-five years of his life in recollection and study. We have almost thirty of his books on devotion, history, and theology. Abelly is not merely the sponsor of *La vie du Vénérable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul*, as has been asserted, but is truly its author. His task was greatly facilitated by Bro. Ducournau, one of the saint's secretaries, who collected and classified the documents. Abelly made a donation to the Saint-Lazare house of some property he owned in Pantin, which became the country house of

cerpts of conferences that are not found in our two manuscript copies. It also contains many of the ones in the manuscripts, but the editing is often so different that it makes us wonder if they did not come from different sources, since several persons would have written down the saint's discourse at the same time. So then, it seems that there are grounds for asking this question: which text reproduces the saint's words most faithfully—the one from the manuscripts or Abelly's? The accord of the ancient manuscript copies, the comparison of the two different texts with that of Bro. Ducournau in the conference on charity, and, lastly, the liberty Abelly usually takes in the material he quotes lead us to conclude that the differences come, not from the plurality of sources, but from the changes made by the biographer and, consequently, that the text from the manuscripts must be preferred.

Fr. Étienne, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission [1843-74], understood that reading the holy Founder's conferences to the first Missioners would be very helpful to their successors. He had facsimiles of the complete conferences of Saint Vincent made in 1844 for the exclusive use of the members of the Congregation of the Mission and, shortly after, of the contents of the other manuscript, to which he added various recommendations given at Chapter on Fridays and some instructions whose source we have been unable to find. The title of the first work is *Collection des Conférences de S. Vincent, de plusieurs de ses lettres et de quelques conférences de M. Almérás, son premier successeur*; the second is *Recueil de diverses exhortations et lettres de S. Vincent aux missionnaires, pour faire suite au premier volume de ses Conférences touchant l'explication des Règles communes*.

Fr. Fiat, the second successor [1878-1914] of Fr. Étienne, had all these conferences printed in one volume entitled *Avis et Conférences de saint Vincent de Paul aux membres de la Congrégation*, published by Pillet and Dumoulin in 1881. This edition has been out of print for years. Together with the *Conferences to the Daughters of*

the students. He died on October 4, 1691, and, according to his wish, was buried in the church of Saint-Lazare, under the Holy Angels chapel. (Cf. Collet, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 5ff.)

Charity and the *Correspondence*, no work can help us to be more deeply imbued with the spirit of this great saint and to give us a better knowledge of the governing principles of such a supernatural and fruitful life as his. The good this book has done for its readers, especially those whose vocation calls them to continue the work of the Missioners to whom Saint Vincent was speaking, is sufficient proof of the good it has been destined to do—reason enough for considering a new edition.

A few documents have been omitted because they would be out of place here;²² others—a much larger number—most of which are taken from the saint's first biographer, have been added. As its title indicates, only the recommendations or talks addressed by Saint Vincent to his Missioners will be found in the present collection, and we think we can assure the reader that all the ones known to be extant are included.²³

This edition differs from the 1881 edition by its closer conformity with the text of the early manuscripts. We would have liked the conformity to be absolute, but we had to be satisfied with slightly modifying the style of the last conferences,²⁴ whose reading, especially in public, would otherwise be too difficult, not to say impossible. Sometimes we have only an incoherent series of obscure sentences that are incorrect or unfinished; Saint Vincent certainly would not have spoken like that. To have these talks printed without editing them would be to give the public an imperfect text of no use to the reader. As is only proper, corrections are limited to the bare minimum and vary as little as possible from the text of the manuscript. We have been very careful not to alter the actual discourses of Saint Vincent, if we have them in his own handwriting or dictated by him, even should they contain many linguistic imperfections. A reporter's faulty editing does not demand the same re-

²²Documents 32, 33, and 90 in the 1881 edition.

²³André Dodin, C.M., (1917-93), in *Saint Vincent de Paul, Entretiens Spirituels aux Missionnaires* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1960), provides the modern reader with most of Abelly's materials. The editors have inserted them as a, b, c, etc. after the appropriate number from the Coste edition.

²⁴The conferences that follow those of August 29, 1659.

spect; better to modify it than to offend the ears of a reader, however little he may be concerned about the rules of grammar.

**MEMO OF BROTHER BERTRAND DUCOURNAU
ON THE TALKS OF SAINT VINCENT¹**

(August 15, 1657)

It seems important for the Company, in the future, to make and preserve an accurate collection of the holy discourses of M. Vincent, for the following reasons:

(1) The best legacy of fathers is the good instruction they leave to their children.

(2) In the world, people are very careful to draw up an inventory and be given possession of the holdings of a perishable inheritance, even though it may often be a stumbling block and a subject of division for the heirs.

(3) If those who squander a beautiful, patrimonial estate do irreparable wrong to their successors, especially when it is intended for their subsistence, the first Missioners will be committing the same acts of injustice toward those who are to come after them if they do not pass on to them the words of life of M. Vincent because, since he is their common father, everything he leaves to them must also be in common.

(4) If the works he has done are works of God, as they seem to be, God must have given him His Spirit to do and maintain them; consequently, the advice and teachings used for that purpose must be considered divine and be gathered up like manna from heaven, whose various tastes have attracted so many different persons of both sexes and of every rank, associated in various ways for so many different

Memo of Bro. Ducournau. - Manuscript notice of Bro. Bertrand Ducournau by Bro. PierreChollier, pp. 151-57.

¹This text was originally added to vol. XII as Appendix I. The editors felt that it would be better placed at the beginning of vol. XI, the first volume of Conferences to the Congregation of the Mission.

good works undertaken and sustained by His guidance. My God, do not allow our distaste, coming perhaps from the abundance of these talks, to cause us to neglect preserving them for the consolation of our absent and future confreres, who will someday have an ardent desire for this food of the soul and will regard as fortunate those who eat it at the table of the master.

(5) Just as he wants Missioners to refrain from writing books, so as not to be distracted in any way from their duties, so he never puts in writing any of the lights he imparts to us or the reprimands he gives. Yet, we know that many saints have shown their virtues more by their writings than by any other actions, in such a way that people would not know them if their books had not revealed their piety. Now, even though the piety of M. Vincent has no need of this help to manifest itself on earth, since it has already diffused its fragrance throughout the Church by his works of charity and through the workers he has given it, his words, nevertheless, are so redolent with his devotion that, if it is true that from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, we will never be able to fathom the extent of his love of God and neighbor and his devotion for the virtues, if we are not familiar with the terms and the care with which he recommended their practice. Who would ever have thought that Our Lord would carry Christian perfection to the point of obliging us to love our enemies, to do good to those who offend us, etc., if the Evangelists had not collected the very words He spoke? So, is it not reasonable that, since the humility of M. Vincent prevents him from leaving us in writing a few indications of the grace that accompanies him, at least those who hear him speak should preserve some written accounts of them? Surely the ages to come, which will have good reason to admire what he did, would be quite right at being surprised not to see anything of what he said, and even to complain about those who heard him, if they failed to share with them the words of wisdom that came from his mouth.

It is said in Solomon² that, if the fool could keep silent, no one would be aware of his folly, and we can say of that King and of all

²Cf. Prov 17:28. (NAB)

other wise men that their wisdom would be unknown if it had not been revealed by their judicious remarks. Now, it is important that the talks of M. Vincent be preserved in the Company so that, if God is pleased to maintain it, they may reveal in all ages and to every nation the spirit of this apostolic man, which will be even more esteemed when it is seen how similar it is to the spirit of the Gospel; and this esteem, necessary for Founders of Communities, will contribute notably to the growth and sanctification of our own.

Objections and replies.

Someone may say that M. Vincent usually says only ordinary things.

To this we may reply that:

(1) Even if this were the case, we should still put them in writing because, if they are ordinary for learned and spiritual persons, they are not so for the Brothers and beginners, who even need to be guided and spurred on by these things rather than by other extraordinary ones of which they are not capable.

(2) A piece of advice which seems insignificant in itself should be considered important when it comes from the mouth of a wise person, who gives weight to it. That's why the Spartans, if I'm not mistaken, unwilling to accept good advice from a wicked man, had it given by an upright person.

(3) Even if M. Vincent speaks on something ordinary, everyone still knows that he does it with extraordinary force; for his eloquence and the grace animating him cause him to treat the most insignificant topics with such devotion that he always imparts this to his listeners, imprinting on their souls respect and reverence for all that concerns God and love for the Rules and practices of the house. That is why each individual is very attentive when he speaks, many are delighted to listen to him, and those who are absent often ask what he said, expressing their regret at not having been present for it.

(4) When he speaks in depth of how to make our meditation, of self-knowledge, of renouncing our own will, of abandonment to and confidence in God (as he did today when telling us how stead-

fast M. Desdames is in his present sufferings in Warsaw)³ of gratitude for the blessings of God, of the good use of His inspirations, of calumnies and afflictions, of compassion for those in distress, of assistance to poor persons, of zeal for the salvation of souls, of the ordinands and of other such things that pertain to the perfection of a Missioner, he carries them to the heights both in regard to practice and to expression. And to show that there is nothing ordinary in either one, I ask what persons speak of these things as he does with such discernment, efficacy, and love, spontaneously and unostentatiously.

Everyone knows that, in the Company, he has no equal in speaking so worthily of God and holy things, and so helpfully for those who listen to him. Thus, he is the leader chosen by God to breathe spirit and life into the members of the Company.

Someone else may say that M. Vincent says nothing that cannot be found in books.

I reply that this may be so; but we know that the best food for babies is their own mother's milk, and that the loving instructions of their fathers make a greater impression on their minds than those of teachers because of the natural respect and affection God has given to all sorts of persons for those who have begotten them. In addition, it is very difficult to find in books the beautiful inspirations and good impulses we receive from the talks of this kind father because he gives them according to our needs and obligations, which differ in many things from those of other Companies that have written about what concerns them. Furthermore, it is a question of a tree being known by its leaves—I mean M. Vincent by his words as well as by his good results, as I've already mentioned, for the edification of posterity, which, seeing him come alive again only through his actions, might say to him what a philosopher once said to someone, "Speak, if you want me to get to know you."

To say that M. Vincent cannot tell us now anything he has not already said and repeated several times should not stop people from taking notes on it. Ah, would to God that, during the thirty years since

³Cf. Conf. 171 in this volume.

the Company began, we had carefully noted what he did and said for our interior progress! We would need no other instructions. We would see in these notes the frequent lifting of his heart to God, his self-annihilation and the outpouring of his paternal heart toward all sorts of persons; we would find in them lessons for everything we do, an attraction for all the virtues, remedies for all our infirmities, weapons against temptations, encouragement in our weaknesses, the right thing to say in conversation, a thousand touches of prudence in correcting a wrong without hurting anyone, and suggesting what is good without being pretentious, with countless reasons for blessing God for having called us to His service under the leadership of this servant of His.

I'm writing this while he is still fully alive, and I'm speaking to those who know the truth of what I say; but, since people have failed to take these notes in the past, it's better to begin them late than not at all. Even if some have been taken in the past and the same things noted a hundred times, all of them written together will show more clearly that the more he spoke of certain virtues or practices, the more he had them at heart and tried to inculcate them in his children.

For all these reasons, it seems that God is asking the Company to write down exactly the advice, remonstrances, corrections, stories, and recommendations that M. Vincent gave in public, even down to the smallest details, as long as God is pleased to preserve him for us. I admit that this will be difficult to do without his noticing it; but the importance of the matter certainly merits our making this effort.

Following are three means from which one may be chosen.

(1) Recommend to the priests, once and for all and under obedience, to retain what M. Vincent says from now on at the Repetitions and conferences, and then always gather them together in a certain place that very day or the day after he has spoken, where one of them, taking up his pen, will ask, "How did M. Vincent begin his talk? How did he continue it, and how did he end it?" Then, with one recalling one thing and someone else another, it will all be put together. It is said that the discourses of blessed Francis de Sales have been collected in this way by the Visitation nuns.

(2) Assign only two men having common sense and a good memory, capable of grasping clearly the gist of his talks and of recalling the references and expressions in them, who will be dispensed from any other duties on those days so that they can write them down and put them in good order while they're still fresh in their mind. I suggest two men because it's difficult for one person to be able to retain everything and then put it in order without the help of someone else.

(3) Lastly, the best thing would be if someone could be found whose mind and hand were quick enough to write down verbatim the very words and exclamations of M. Vincent at the time he spoke them.

May God be pleased to inspire the Assistants with what they have to do! If they feel that I can be of help in this, all they have to do is to order me to do so, after having convinced M. Vincent to find someone else to be his secretary; for I'm not intelligent enough to be able to do it all, and he might be happy to relieve me of this duty because of the mistakes I make in it, if they consent to point out to him that such a duty would be more fitting for a priest, whom he could entrust with many replies and other business, and that several may find it difficult that a coadjutor Brother should know what they write and what goes on in their houses.

Saint-Lazare, the glorious feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, 1657.⁴

Note: This English edition of the conferences uses an informal, conversational style in order to preserve the spontaneity and simplicity of the exchanges between Saint Vincent and the confreres and to provide a translation that appeals to the modern reader.

—Ed.

⁴Bro. Chollier adds that "Since M. Vincent's Assistants were edified and touched by the devotion of our confrere Bro. Ducournau for our venerated Father and Founder, they commissioned him to make the collection he was suggesting, although they did not give him the time he needed and did not release him from his work with M. Vincent. Nevertheless, he made such good use of all his free moments and carried out this commission so zealously that he collected enough of M. Vincent's talks to the Community to fill two or three thick volumes."

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

CONFERENCES TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

1. - THE VOCATION OF A MISSIONER

“The state of the Missioners is one in conformity with the evangelical maxims, which consists in leaving and abandoning everything, as the Apostles did, to follow Jesus Christ and, in imitation of Him, to do what is proper. Since that is so, as someone said to me on one occasion, only the devil can find fault with that state; for, is there anything more Christian than to go from village to village to help poor persons to be saved, as you see being done with great fatigue and inconvenience! We have certain confreres working at present in a village of the Évreux diocese, where they even have to sleep on straw. Why? To help souls get to paradise through instruction and suffering. Doesn't that come close to what Our Lord came to do? Not only did He not have a stone on which to lay His head, but He came and went from one place to another to win souls for God and, in the end, He died for them. He certainly could not have made us understand more clearly how dear they are to Him, nor convince us more effectively to spare nothing to instruct them with His teachings and bathe them in the fountains of His Precious Blood. But, if we want Him to grant us this grace, let's strive for humility, especially since the more humble we are, the more charitable we'll be toward our neighbor. Charity is the paradise of Communities and the soul of the virtues, and it's humility that attracts and preserves them. Humble Companies are like valleys that draw down on themselves sap from

the mountains. As soon as we empty ourselves of self, God will fill us with himself; for He can't stand a vacuum.

“So, my dear confreres, let's humble ourselves to know that God has looked to this Little Company to serve His Church—if we can call a Company a fistful of men of lowly birth, learning, and virtue, the dregs, the sweepings, and the rejects of the world. Two or three times every day I ask God to destroy us if we're not useful for His glory. *Quoi*, Messieurs! Would we want to be in this world without pleasing God and procuring for Him His greater glory?”

2. - THE MISSION PREACHED IN FOLLEVILLE IN 1617

After relating the conversion of the peasant of Gannes,¹ M. Vincent added, “Shame prevents many of those good country people from confessing all their sins to their Pastors, keeping them in a state of damnation. On this point, one of the greatest men of our day was asked a while ago if those people could be saved with that shame, which deprives them of the courage to confess certain sins. His answer was that there was no doubt that, if they died in that state, they would be damned. Alas, *mon Dieu!* (I said to myself), then how many of them are being lost! And how important is the practice of general confession, which remedies this misfortune, when it's accompanied by true contrition, as it usually is! Because he was truly touched by the spirit of penance, that man said aloud that he would have been damned; for, when a soul is filled with this spirit, it conceives such a horror of sin that not only does it confess it to the priest but would be ready to accuse itself publicly, if that were necessary for its salvation. I've seen people who, after their general confession, wanted to declare their sins publicly before everyone, and I had a hard time restraining them. Even though I forbade them to do it, they said to me, ‘No, Monsieur, I'll tell them to everyone; I'm a wretched

Conference 2. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. VIII, pp. 32ff., excerpt.

¹A place about ten miles from the Château de Folleville (Somme), on the estates of Mme de Gondi.

man and I deserve to die.’ Please note in that the impression made by grace and the power of sorrow. I’ve seen several people with this great desire, and we often see it. Yes, when God enters a heart in this way, He causes it to conceive such a horror of the offenses committed that the person wants to reveal them to the whole world. In fact, there are some who, touched by this spirit of compunction, have no problem saying aloud, ‘I’m a wicked man because, on such and such an occasion, I did this and that; I ask forgiveness of God, of the Pastor, and of the whole parish for it.’ We also see that the greatest saints practiced this. In Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, he made public his sins to everyone, in imitation of Saint Paul, who declared aloud and wrote in his Epistles that he had been a blasphemer and a persecutor of the Church, in order to show even more how merciful God was to Him. That’s the effect of grace that fills a heart; it casts out whatever is contrary to it.”

This grace prompted the peasant of Gannes to acknowledge publicly, even in the presence of Mme de Gondy,² whose vassal he was, the serious sins of his past life. “Ah, Monsieur! What’s this?” that virtuous lady then said to the saint. “What have we just heard? No doubt it’s the same for most of these poor people. If this man, who is considered an upright man, was in a state of damnation, what will it be like for others who live more badly? Ah, M. Vincent! How many souls are being lost! How can this be remedied?”

Then M. Vincent continued, “That took place in the month of January 1617, and, on the twenty-fifth, the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, that lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church of Folleville to urge the people to make a general confession, which I

²Françoise-Marguerite de Silly, wife of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondy, was born in 1580 of Antoine de Silly, Comte de Rochepot, Baron de Montmirail, Ambassador to Spain, and of Marie de Lannoy. Shortly after Saint Vincent entered her house as her children’s tutor, she entrusted to him the direction of her soul. The saint’s influence was not long in making itself felt. The devout woman formed the habit of visiting and serving the sick, and of distributing abundant alms to the poor. She had missions given on her estates and joined the Confraternity of Charity in Montmirail. She died on June 23, 1625, after having her saintly director named head of the Collège des Bons-Enfants, and having provided him with the means of establishing the Congregation of the Mission by a gift of forty-five thousand livres. (Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, vol. I, chaps. VII-XVIII; Hilarion de Coste, *Les éloges et vies des reynes, princesses, dames et damoiselles illustres en piété, courage et doctrine* [Paris: S. Cramoisy, 1630], vol. II, pp 389 ff.; Régis de Chantelauze, *Saint Vincent de Paul et les Gondy* [Paris: E. Plon, 1882].)

did, pointing out to them its importance and usefulness. Then I taught them how to make it properly; and God had such regard for the confidence and good faith of that lady—for the large number and enormity of my sins would have hindered the success of this act—that He blessed what I said; and those good people were so moved by God that they all came to make their general confession. I continued to instruct them and to prepare them for the sacraments, and I began to hear their confessions. But there was such a large crowd that, even with the help of another priest, I couldn't hear them all. Madame sent someone to ask the Jesuits of Amiens to come to assist us, writing to the Rector, who came himself. Since he couldn't stay very long, he sent Fr. Fourché of the same Company to take his place. The latter helped us hear confessions, preach, and teach the catechism and, by the mercy of God, found plenty to keep him busy. Next, we went to the other villages belonging to Madame in that area, and did the same as in the first one. There was a huge crowd, and God gave His blessing everywhere. That was the first sermon of the Mission and the success God gave it on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, and He certainly had a plan in mind on that day."

3. - THE SUCCESS OF TWO MISSIONS

"I ask the Company to thank God for His blessings on the missions we've just given, especially the great ones during the mission in. . . . There was a scandalous division in that parish: the inhabitants had a strong aversion to their Pastor. On his part, the Pastor had good reason to resent being treated badly by his parishioners, and he took them to court over it. He even had three or four of the instigators imprisoned because they had gone so far as to manhandle him in the church, or some of his people. Most of them were unwilling even to hear Mass, and would leave the church when they saw him go to the altar. In a word, it was a very bad situation, and I've yet to see any-

thing like it. They swore they'd never go to confession to him and that they'd rather let Easter go by without receiving Communion.

“Seeing themselves reduced to this state, some of them came here to this house a while ago to ask us to go to preach a mission to them. We did, and, by the mercy of God, they all made their [Easter] duty. But, what should induce us even more to bless and thank God is that they have been totally reconciled with their Pastor and are now enjoying great peace and union, for which both sides are very pleased and equally grateful, for ten or twelve of them are here to thank us on behalf of the whole parish. They've told me so many good things about that mission that it was difficult to hear them all.

“Who did all that, Messieurs, if not God alone? Was it in the power of men to reunite them? Indeed, even if an entire Parlement¹ had been involved in such a difficult compromise between persons so strongly alienated, it would scarcely have managed to settle what concerned only external discipline. So then, it's God who is the Author of this good work and whom we must thank for it.

“I ask you, Messieurs, to do so with all possible devotion and, in addition, to ask His Divine Goodness to give the Company the spirit of union and of bringing about union, which is none other than the Holy Spirit himself, so that, being always closely united in itself, it may be able to unite those outside the Company; for we've been established to reconcile souls with God and people with one another.”

¹Parlement refers to the French judicial system. At the time of Saint Vincent, France had eight Parlements, each with its own legal jurisdiction, chief of which was the Parlement of Paris. They registered or gave sanction to the King's edicts, ordinances, and declarations, and supervised their implementation.

4. - FORMATION OF THE CLERGY

“The distinguishing mark of priests is a participation in the priesthood of the Son of God, who has given them the power to sacrifice His own Body and to give it as food, so that those who eat it will have eternal life. That’s a totally divine and incomparable characteristic, a power over the Body of Jesus Christ that angels admire, and a power to forgive the sins of the people, which is a great source of amazement and gratitude to them. Is there anything greater and more admirable? Oh, Messieurs! What a great thing a good priest is! What is there that a good priest can’t do and what conversions can he not obtain? Just look at that excellent priest M. Bourdoise;¹ what is he not doing and what can he not do! The success of Christianity depends on priests; for, when good parishioners see a good member of the clergy, a charitable Pastor, they honor him, do what he says, and try to imitate him. We have to strive to make all of them good, since that’s our ministry, and the priesthood is something so lofty.

“But, *mon Sauveur!* If a good priest can do so much good, what harm can a bad one do when he’s given over to that! *O Dieu!* How hard it is to restore him to a good state. How fervently the poor Missioners must give themselves to You, my Savior, to contribute to the formation of good priests, since it’s the most difficult, the most lofty, and the most important ministry there is for the salvation of souls and the advancement of Christianity!

“If Saint Vincent Ferrer² stirred himself up to holiness so that God would one day raise up good priests and apostolic workers in

Conference 4. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. V, p. 298, excerpt. This conference was given before July 19, 1655, the day Adrien Bourdoise died.

¹Adrien Bourdoise, born July 1, 1584, in Brou (Eure-et-Loire) and died in Paris July 19, 1655, was one of the most zealous reformers of the clergy in the seventeenth century. He founded a Community called the priests of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, or Nicolaïtes, from the name of the parish in Paris in which they were located. He made one of his retreats at Saint-Lazare. This fact and his advising the Duc de Liancourt, patron of several benefices, to rely on the judgment of Vincent de Paul for the choice of beneficed clergymen, show the great esteem he had for the saint. As this conference indicates, Saint Vincent in turn had great respect for M. Bourdoise.

²Vincent Ferrer, a Spanish Dominican, was born in Valencia on January 23, 1350. He worked to terminate the Great Western Schism, a period when there were two lines of claimants for the papal throne (1378-1417). Traveling throughout Europe, he preached the need for repentance and reform; miracles in the order of nature and grace accompanied his preaching. By his personal influence and constant direction, he prevented enthusiasm from degenerating into fanaticism. He

order to elevate the priestly state and prepare men for the Last Judgment, for what greater reason must we, who see the priestly state being restored in our day, stir ourselves up to ever greater holiness in order to cooperate in such a desirable renewal.”

5. - FORMATION OF THE CLERGY

“To devote oneself to the formation of good priests and to carry out this ministry as a secondary instrumental efficient cause is to do what Jesus Christ did, who, during His mortal life, seems to have made it His duty to form twelve good priests, His Apostles. For this purpose He remained several years with them to instruct and form them for this divine ministry.”

6. - MINISTRY WITH THE ORDINANDS

“*Or sus*, my dear confreres, we’re now on the eve of that great ministry God has entrusted to us; tomorrow, my God, is the day we’re to welcome those whom Your Providence has determined to send us so that we can do our part in working with You to make them better. Ah, Messieurs! What an important phrase ‘to make better priests’! Who could understand the loftiness of this ministry? It’s the most elevated one there is. Is anything in this world as great as the priestly state? Principalities and kingdoms can’t compare to it. You know that, unlike priests, Kings can’t change bread into the Body of Our Lord or forgive sins; you know all the other advantages priests have beyond temporal greatness; and yet, nevertheless, these are the people God is sending us to sanctify them. Is there anything like it? O poor, insignificant workers! What little resem-

died in Vannes on April 5, 1419, and was canonized by Pope Callistus III on June 3, 1455. Saint Vincent numbered him among his patron saints.

Conference 5. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. II, sect. IV, p. 222, excerpt.

Conference 6. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. II, sect. IV, p. 226, excerpt.

blance there is between you and the dignity of this ministry! But, since God is bestowing on this Little Company, the least and poorest of all, the honor of devoting itself to that, we must, on our part, put all our effort into making a success of this apostolic plan which aims at preparing future priests for Major Orders and to carry out their ministry properly; for some will become Pastors, others Canons, others Provosts, Abbots, and Bishops—yes, Bishops. These are the persons we'll be welcoming tomorrow.

"Last week, the Bishops had a meeting to find some way to remedy the excessive drinking of priests in a certain province—a very difficult task. The holy Doctors say that the first step for a person who wants to acquire virtue is to become the master of his mouth. Now, the mouth has the mastery over persons who give it what it asks for. What a disorder! They're its servants, its slaves; they're only what it wills. There's nothing worse or more deplorable than to see priests—and most of them from one province—addicted to this vice to the point that the Bishops have to meet, and all of them have to go to a lot of trouble to try to find some remedy for this unfortunate situation. And what will the people do after that? But what must we not do, Messieurs, to give ourselves to God to help to withdraw His ministers and His spouse from this infamy and from so many other misfortunes in which we see them only too often? Not that all priests are leading a disorderly life; *Sauveur*, no! There are holy priests. Many of them come to us here for retreat: Pastors and others who come from a great distance to put their interior life in good order! And how many good, holy priests there are in Paris! There's a great number of them; and there's not a single one of the members of the Conference¹ who meet here who isn't an exemplary man. They're all working with unparalleled success.

"There are also bad priests in the world, and I am the worst, the most unworthy, and the greatest sinner of all of them. But, on the other hand, there are also those who give high praise to God by the holiness of their lives. What a happiness that God not only wants to make use of poor people like us, unlearned and without virtue, to

¹Tuesday Conferences.

help straighten out fallen, dissolute priests, but also to help the good ones to grow in holiness, as we see being done, by the grace of God! How fortunate you are, Messieurs, to spread the Spirit of God in those souls by your own devotion, gentleness, friendliness, modesty, and humility, and to serve God in the person of His greatest servants! How fortunate you are, you who give them good example at the conferences and ceremonies, in choir, in the refectory, and everywhere else! How happy all of us will be if, by our silence, discretion, and charity, we correspond to the intentions for which God sends them to us by making use of a special vigilance to see, look for, and bring them without delay whatever can make them happy, and by being ingenious in providing for their needs and serving them. If we do that, we'll edify them. We really have to beg Our Lord earnestly for this grace; I ask the priests to say Holy Mass and our Brothers to hear Mass for this intention."

7. - MINISTRY WITH THE ORDINANDS

"It's almost ordination time; we're going to ask God to give His Spirit to those who will speak to those men both in the instructions and in the conferences. Above all, each of us will strive to edify them by humility and modesty, for it's not by knowledge that they'll be won over, or by the beautiful things they'll be told—they're more learned than we are. Several of them have their Bachelor's and some have a Licentiate in Theology; others are Doctors of Canon Law, and there are very few of them who don't know philosophy and some theology; they discuss them every day. There's almost nothing new that we can tell them that they haven't already read or heard; they themselves say that it isn't this that moves them but the virtues they see being practiced here. Let's humble ourselves, Messieurs, in the face of such an honorable ministry as that of helping to form good priests; for what is more excellent? Let's humble ourselves in the face of our insignificance, we who are poor in knowledge, in spirit, and in our so-

cial status. Alas! How is it that God has chosen us for something so great? It's because He ordinarily uses the most inferior materials for the extraordinary workings of His grace, as in the sacraments, where He makes use of water and words to confer His greatest graces.

"Let's pray for these men; but let's pray also for ourselves, that God will remove anything that might be the cause of their not receiving the effects of the Spirit of God, which He seems to want to share with the Company for this purpose. Have you ever gone on pilgrimage to some place of devotion? On entering it, we usually feel as if we're outside of ourselves, some finding themselves suddenly lifted up in God, others moved to devotion, others filled with respect and reverence for that holy place, and others have various good sentiments. What accounts for this? It's because the Spirit of God is there and makes itself felt in those ways. Now, we have to think that it will be the same here with regard to those men, if the Spirit of God resides in this house.

"We have to familiarize them with Moral Theology and always go into detail so that they hear and understand it well. This must always be the goal, acting in such a way that those who are listening take away with them everything said to them in the instruction. Let's be very careful that this cursed spirit of vanity doesn't worm its way in among us, making us want to speak of things that are lofty and exalted, for that only ruins things instead of giving edification. Now, they'll take away everything that will be said to them in the instruction if we instill it in them simply afterward and speak to them only of that and not of other things, which is advisable for several reasons."

8. - CONFERENCES FOR THE CLERGY

"If there are any persons alive who are obliged to make use of and benefit from conferences, I think they're the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission because God has turned to them to introduce into the world of the clergy this manner of discussing particular virtues in

this way. When I came to Paris, I had never seen anything like these conferences, at least on the virtues proper to their particular state and how to live their vocation well; yes, academia, where they would converse on certain points of doctrine and, in some places, cases of conscience. About fifty years ago, Cardinal de Sourdis¹ introduced this method into his diocese of Bordeaux to treat certain points of Moral Theology. He brought together successfully the Pastors and the other priests to give them the means of becoming better instructed; but, until we began it, nothing was done on the virtues proper to one's state among members of the clergy like us—or at least I never saw or heard of it. It's very true that many good male religious have this holy practice like the ancient monks formerly had; but, be that as it may, it's to this insignificant Congregation that God has been pleased to turn in this age in order to establish it outside the Community, not only as a fitting antidote for good priests, who, in the service of souls, remain exposed to the corrupt air of the world, but also to help them to become more perfect in their vocation. So, God has inspired the Congregation of the Mission to stir itself up and to become devoted to the practice of virtue through the conferences. Motives for acquiring virtues, their nature, their specific acts, the means of putting them into practice and, lastly, the obligations of our state both with regard to God and with the neighbor are treated in them. That's the aim of the conferences. Now, what would become of us if we were the first to neglect them? What account would we have to render to God if we were to disdain such helpful and efficacious means, undertaken so avidly by those ancient Fathers and Anchorites, as Cassian² reports in a book he wrote about this? I must confess that, in my own experience, nothing touches me more or moves me so deeply; and nothing of what I hear, read, or see makes a greater impression on me than these conferences."

¹François Escombleaux, Cardinal de Sourdis.

²John Cassian (c. 360-433), monk and ascetical writer.

9. - RETREAT MINISTRY

“O Messieurs, how highly we must esteem the grace God grants us of bringing to us so many persons in order to help them work out their salvation! There are even many soldiers who come here, and one of them said to me a short time ago, ‘Monsieur, I’ll soon have to go into certain situations, and I want to put myself in a good state beforehand; I have remorse of conscience, and, not knowing what might happen to me, I’m here to prepare myself for whatever God will want to ordain for me.’ By the grace of God, we now have in this house a good number of persons on retreat. O Messieurs, what great benefits can that not produce, if we work at it faithfully! What a misfortune, however, if this house one day becomes lax in this practice! Let me tell you, my dear confreres, that I fear that the time may come when it will no longer have the zeal which, until now, has caused it to welcome so many persons for retreat. And then what would happen? There would be reason to fear that God might not only withdraw from the Company the grace of this ministry but even deprive it of all the others. The day before yesterday someone told me that the Parlement had degraded a member of the Council that day, and when they summoned him, dressed in his red robe, to the Great Chamber, where all the others were assembled, the President called his bailiffs and ordered them to remove that robe and his cap, since he was unworthy of those marks of honor and unfit for the office he held. The same would happen to us, Messieurs, if we made poor use of God’s graces by neglecting our primary duties. God would take them from us, since we would be unworthy of the state in which He has placed us and of the ministries He has entrusted to us. *Mon Dieu!* What a cause for grief!

“Now, to be thoroughly convinced of the serious harm that would befall us if God were to deprive us of the honor of rendering Him this service, we must reflect that many people come here to make their retreat in order to know God’s Will, having been inspired to leave the world; and I commend one of them to your prayers. He has finished

his retreat and, when he leaves here, will be going to the Capuchins to take the habit. Some Communities send us many men who want to enter them, and they send them to make their retreat here in order to test their vocation better before they accept them. Others come from ten, twenty, or fifty leagues away for this purpose, not only to recollect themselves here and to make a general confession but to decide on a choice of life in the world and to take the means of saving themselves in it. We also see a number of Pastors and other clergy who come here from everywhere to set themselves aright in their vocation and to advance in the spiritual life. All of them come without having to worry about bringing any money with them, knowing that they'll be well received without it. Speaking of that, someone was telling me lately that, for those who don't have any, it was a great consolation to know that there was a place in Paris that was always ready to take them in through charity, whenever they presented themselves with a genuine intention to put themselves on better terms with God.

"This house, Messieurs, was formerly a refuge for lepers; they were welcomed in it, and not one of them was cured. Now it's used to welcome sinners, sick persons covered with spiritual leprosy, but who are cured by the grace of God. Or rather, let's say that they're dead persons who have come back to life. What happiness that the Saint-Lazare house should be a place of resurrection! After remaining in the tomb for three days, that saint left it fully alive; and Our Lord, who raised him from the dead, has done the same favor for many others who, after being here for a few days as in the tomb of Lazarus, leave it with a new life. Who will not rejoice over such a blessing and have sentiments of love and gratitude for God's goodness and for such a great benefit?

"But what a source of shame if we make ourselves unworthy of such a grace! How embarrassed we'll be, Messieurs, and what regret will we not experience some day if, through our own fault, we're disgraced before God and men! What a cause of suffering and distress will a poor Brother of the Company not have when he now sees so many people of the world coming from everywhere to make a little retreat with us to change their lives, and who will then see this great benefit neglected! He'll see that no one is received any longer; in a

word, he'll no longer see what he has seen; for we could reach that stage, Messieurs, perhaps not right away but in the course of time. What will be the cause of that? If you say to a poor lax Missioner, 'Monsieur, would you please guide this man during his retreat?' that request will be a torture for him; and, if he doesn't beg off, he'll simply drag his feet, as they say; he'll be so anxious to satisfy himself, and will find it so hard to give up a half hour or so of his recreation after dinner and as long after supper, that this time will be intolerable for him, even though it's given for the salvation of a soul and will be the best spent hour of his entire day. Others will grumble about this ministry, under the pretext that it's very burdensome and demands a lot of energy. So, the Priests of the Mission, who formerly would have given life to the dead, will no longer have anything but the name and appearance of what they once were. They'll be only corpses and not true Missioners; they'll be the carcasses of Saint Lazarus, not the resurrected Lazarus, and, even less, men who bring others back to life. This Mission, which is now like a beneficial pool, where so many come to bathe, will be nothing but a cistern contaminated by the laxity and idleness of the men who live in it. Let's pray to God that this misfortune may not occur, my dear confreres; let's ask the Blessed Virgin to divert it through her intercession and her desire for the conversion of sinners; let's ask the great Saint Lazarus to be pleased to be always the protector of this house and to obtain for it the grace of persevering in the good already begun."

10. - RETREAT MINISTRY

"Let's thank God a million times, my dear confreres, for having been pleased to choose the Saint-Lazare house to be a theater of His mercies, where the Holy Spirit continually descends upon souls. If someone could see with bodily eyes this outpouring, how delighted he would be! But what a happiness for us Missioners that Saint-Lazare should be a throne of the justifications of God and that

the Saint-Lazare house should be a setting in which the resting place of the King of Kings is prepared in the well-disposed souls of those who come here to make their retreat! Let's serve them, Messieurs, not simply as men but as men sent by God. Let there be no discrimination; let the poor one be as dear to us as the rich one, and even more so, since he's in greater conformity with the life Jesus Christ led on earth. I commend to your prayers one of these men who has a very special need. There's no doubt that he's capable of doing much good, if he's totally converted to God; but, on the contrary, if he isn't properly converted, there's reason to fear that he may do a great deal of harm."

11. - RETREAT MINISTRY

"We have in this house a captain who wants to be a Carthusian, and who has been sent to us by those good Fathers to test his vocation, as is their custom. I urge you to commend him to Our Lord, and, at the same time, to reflect on the greatness of His goodness in taking a man, when he was firmly committed to a state so contrary to the one to which he now aspires. Let us adore this merciful Providence and acknowledge that God is no respecter of persons but, in His infinite goodness, takes them from all sorts of life situations as He sees fit.

"We have another military man with us, who is likewise a captain; we'll praise God for this and pray for him along with the other one. Remember another one in your prayers as well, a new convert—a very good one—from the so-called reformed religion;¹ right now he's working and writing for the defense of the truth he has embraced, and by this means will be able to win over others. We thank God for this and entreat Him to increase His graces in him more and more."

Conference 11. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. IV, sect. III, p. 283, excerpt.

¹ The Huguenot religion: the Reformed Church in France, a Protestant group that espoused the spiritual and political tenets of John Calvin.

12. - RETREAT MINISTRY

“In the past few days we had a priest who had come from a great distance to make his retreat, and the first thing he said to me was, ‘Monsieur, I’m coming to you, and if you don’t accept me I’m lost.’ And when he left, he seemed so touched by the Spirit of God that I was exceptionally surprised by this. Three others traveled from far-off Champagne, having encouraged one another to come to make their retreat at Saint-Lazare. *O Dieu!* How many men are coming here from far and near on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit! But what a powerful grace is needed to lead men from all over to such a crucifixion, for a spiritual retreat aims to crucify the flesh, so we can say with the holy Apostle, ‘I am crucified to the world, and the world to me.’¹ ”

13. - THE MENTALLY ILL OR DEPRAVED BOARDERS CONFINED AT SAINT-LAZARE

“I recommend to the prayers of the Company our boarders here, both those who are mentally ill and the others who are not, including a priest who, having been mentally ill for a time, recovered and was doing better but, unfortunately, has had a setback. This illness came upon him in a fit of depression which addled his brain and weakened him so much that he relapsed into that sad state. The poor man can feel this illness coming on, which—as he himself says—always starts with a black melancholy, impossible to shake off. Those who are reduced to this state certainly deserve great compassion. It’s very true that, in a certain sense, they’re in a state of sinlessness, since they’re not masters of their own wills and have neither judgment nor freedom. In that, they must be considered blessed, if, when they fell into it, they were in the grace of God, just as they are greatly to be pitied if this illness surprised them in the state of mortal sin.

Conference 12. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. IV, sect. III, p. 283, excerpt.

¹Cf. Gal 6:14. (NAB)

Conference 13. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. VI, p. 307, excerpt.

“The others we have here in this house, and who are in their right mind but make bad use of it, give me reason to say that in today’s world we see among these young people a great deal of rebellion and debauchery, which seem to be increasing daily. A while ago, a man of the upper class, one of the leading officials of a sovereign Court, was complaining about a nephew of his, a very depraved young man, who had gone so far as to threaten several times to kill him if he didn’t give him some money. When one of the town Magistrates advised him to put him in Saint-Lazare, where there was a good program to bring him back to his duty, he told him that he didn’t know that people like that were accepted there; and, thanking him for this advice, told him that he wished there were four houses in Paris like Saint-Lazare to prevent such disorders.

“Let’s thank God, Messieurs, for having given this Community the care of the mentally ill and the incorrigible. We didn’t seek out this ministry; it was given to us by His Providence, along with all the others in the Company. In this regard, let me tell you that, when we entered this house, the Prior¹ had taken in two or three poor, mentally ill persons; and, since we were replacing him, we took over their care and guidance. At that time, we were involved in a lawsuit, in which there was question of our being evicted or staying in the Saint-Lazare house. I recall asking myself then, ‘If you had to leave this house right now, what and who would touch you the most? What would give you the greatest displeasure and sadness?’ And I thought at that time that it would be that I’d be unable to see those poor persons any longer and would be obliged to abandon their care and service.

“Don’t think, my dear confreres, that it’s a small thing to be devoted to the relief of those in distress, for we’re giving pleasure to God. Yes, we are; taking care of these mentally ill persons is one of the ministries that pleases Him the most; it’s all the more meritorious because nature finds no satisfaction in it, and it’s a good work that’s done in secret and for persons who don’t realize that they should be

¹ Adrien Le Bon, Canon Regular of Saint Augustine, was born in Neufchâtel (Seine-Maritime) and died at Saint-Lazare on April 9, 1651, in his seventy-fourth year. As Prior of Saint-Lazare, he supervised the transfer of the priory to Saint Vincent and the Congregation of the Mission. He also donated a number of farms for the support of the Congregation.

grateful to us. Let's ask God to give the priests of the Company the spirit of leadership for these types of ministry when they're working in them, to strengthen our poor Brothers, animating them with His grace in order to banish the trials and put up with the work they have every day with these boarders, some of whom are physically ill and others mentally ill, some ignorant, others flighty, some insane, and others addicted to vice; in a word, all of them ill in mind but some because of weakness and others because of malice. The former are here to recover their health, and the latter to be cured of their evil ways.

“So then, courage, my dear confreres; are you aware that in the past there were Popes engaged in the care of animals? Yes, in the times of the Emperors who were persecuting the Church in its head and in its members, they used to arrest the Popes and make them look after the lions, leopards, and other similar beasts that would serve as entertainment for those infidel Princes and were like images of their cruelty; and the Popes were the ones who took care of these animals.² Now, the men for whose external needs you're responsible aren't wild beasts, but they are, in a certain sense, worse than animals by their conduct and debauchery. Yet, God willed to have those holy persons, the fathers of all Christians, undergo those humiliations and extraordinary sufferings in order to learn through personal experience to commiserate with the humiliations and adversities of their spiritual children; for, when a person has personally experienced his own weaknesses and trials, he's more sensitive to those of others. Those who have suffered the loss of property, health, and honor are much more likely to console persons who have these trials and tribulations than others who don't know what that is. I recall that one day someone was telling me about a great, holy person, who was firm and constant by nature, strong-minded, afraid of nothing, and hardly ever subject to temptations. Because of that, he was all the less suited to tolerate the weak, console the afflicted, and assist the sick since he himself had never gone through those situations.

²Pope Saint Marcellus (May 308-January 309). A fifth century *Passio Marcelli* and the *Liber Pontificalis* contain the legend that the Emperor Maxentius turned Marcellus' titular church into a stable and that the Pope died there as a result of his labors as a stable hand.

“You know that Our Lord willed to be tried by all kinds of misery. ‘We have a High Priest,’ says Saint Paul, ‘who knows how to sympathize with our weaknesses because He has experienced them himself.’³ Yes, O Eternal Wisdom, You willed to experience and take upon Your innocent person all our poverty! You know, Messieurs, that He did that to sanctify all the sufferings to which we’re subject and to be the original and prototype of all the states and conditions of human persons. O my Savior, You who are uncreated Wisdom, You took on and embraced our miseries, our confusion, and our humiliations and infamy, with the exception of ignorance and sin; You willed to be the scandal of the Jews and the folly of the Gentiles; You even willed to seem like You were out of Your mind. Yes, Our Lord was really willing to pass for an insane person, as is recounted in the Holy Gospel, and for people to believe that He had become a madman. *Exierunt tenere eum; et dicebant quoniam in furorem versus est.*⁴ The Apostles themselves sometimes considered Him as a man who had become mad, and He appeared like that to them so that they might not only be witnesses to the fact that He had sympathized with all our weaknesses and sanctified our states of suffering and frailty, but also to teach them, and us as well, to have compassion on those who fall into these weaknesses.

“Let’s bless and thank God, my dear confreres, for entrusting to us the care of these poor men, deprived of their intelligence and reason; for, in serving them, we see and touch the extent and diversity of human misery. Through this knowledge we’ll be better suited to work effectively for the neighbor and to carry out our functions with even greater fidelity because we’ll know better from experience what it is to suffer. Nevertheless, I ask those who are ministering to these boarders to take very good care of them, and I ask the Company to commend them often to God and to appreciate this opportunity to practice charity and patience with these poor people.”⁵

³Cf. Heb 4:14-15. (NAB)

⁴*They set out to seize him because they said that He was out of His mind.* Cf. Mk 3:21. (NAB)

⁵According to Coste, Abelly added lines from the conference of December 6, 1658 (XII, Conf. 195).

14. - MINISTRY OF CHAPLAIN IN THE SERVICE OF A NOBLEMAN

Motives:

- (1) Because so little has been said on this very important topic.
- (2) Because God can be greatly glorified by it.
- (3) Because the Company directs many priests.

Qualities of a Chaplain:

(1) It is to be hoped that he might be a holy man—not of perfect sanctity, which is only for perfect saints, but that he have solid virtue—not just any kind, nor like that of a neophyte, but that he be a deeply interior man.

(2) He should have a very orderly appearance, otherwise, he'd be the laughing-stock of all the servants in the house.

(3) He should be very chaste.

(4) He should have great contempt for honors and wealth, and make little account of what is prized by the great ones of this world, who usually think only of honors and wealth. For that reason, he should not render service in the hope of obtaining a benefice. It has been reported that someone said this was mental simony.

(5) He should be very prudent and not discuss matters with others.

I'm not going to report the means. This is what M. Vincent had to say: "Messieurs, I think we were right to discuss this matter because someone in the Company may be chosen by God to serve Him in this capacity. I bless God for the inspirations He gave to those who have spoken.

"As for duties, the first concerns the man himself: to watch carefully over all his actions, and, for that reason, to be very exact to the little Rule of the Company, especially to meditation. Messieurs, someone did me the honor of asking for a man to serve in this capacity. When I proposed one, I was asked, 'Is he a man of prayer?' I assured him that he was, and I was immediately told that there was reason to hope for all sorts of blessings, that great piety was preferred to great knowledge, and that there would be enough time for

that during his leisure hours. He must give himself to God to show great respect for his master and the master's wife, and to adore God in his master and the Blessed Virgin in his wife. The second duty is to do what the Pastor does in the parish because he's actually the Pastor. The late M. Duval¹ believed that in the rural area the chaplain was the Pastor of the *Seigneur* of whom he was the chaplain."

M. Vincent said that this is what was done at the Court, that the head chaplain was the Pastor of all those at the Court; that's the intention of the Church. So, he has to do what the Pastor does with regard to his parishioners:

"(1) *Offer the Holy Sacrifice reverently.* In order to do that, it should be neither too short nor too long, *circum circa*.² After Mass, make the customary bows and do it in the proper spirit. After our late good Father of Geneva³ had celebrated Mass in the presence of an important *Seigneur*, he would make a deep bow. What do you think our blessed man was thinking about, Messieurs? Far from thinking about courteous gestures and worldly compliments, he was adoring the lordship of God in those persons.

"(2) *Instruct.* It would be a good thing to give the instruction publicly, but that usually doesn't work, especially since most people go off to take care of their own affairs; rather, win over the servants and

¹André Duval, renowned Doctor of the Sorbonne, author of several learned works, friend and adviser of Saint Vincent, was born in Pontoise on January 15, 1564, and died in Paris on September 9, 1638. The saint never made an important decision without having recourse to his wisdom. He asked his advice before accepting Saint-Lazare (cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XXII, p. 97) and before establishing vows in the Congregation. The humble Doctor got upset one day when he saw his portrait in one of the rooms at Saint-Lazare. He insisted so much that Saint Vincent had to remove it. (Cf. Robert Duval, *Vie d'André Duval, docteur de Sorbonne*, manuscript copy [Robert Duval was the nephew of André Duval]; J. Calvet, "Un confesseur de Saint Vincent," in *Petites Annales de Saint Vincent*, May 1903, p. 135.) Duval was also the uncle of two Priests of the Mission, Jean and Philippe Le Vacher.

²All round about.

³Saint Francis de Sales, who honored Saint Vincent with his friendship, was born in Thorens, near Annecy on August 21, 1567, and died in Lyons on December 28, 1622. "Many times I have had the honor of enjoying the close friendship of Francis de Sales," declared the saint at the beatification process of his illustrious friend on April 17, 1628. He always spoke of the Bishop of Geneva with great admiration, considering him worthy of the honors reserved to the saints. According to Coqueret, a Doctor of the Sorbonne, Saint Francis de Sales, on his part, used to say that "he did not know a more worthy or more saintly priest than M. Vincent." (Postulatory letter from the Bishop of Tulle, March 21, 1706.) When it came to appointing a Superior for the Visitation convent in Paris, he chose Vincent de Paul.

kitchen boys, and take them privately to instruct them. He should say grace at table, unless some high-ranking priest is there and does it. If the master thinks he should participate in the conversation during dinner, he must do it. Some of them don't find that appropriate; others do, when there's question of some topic regarding the priestly state or if his opinion is asked about something.

"Next, he must eat with the butler; he sits down after him; custom has prevailed for this disorder. He must be a great example of virtue and reserve there, not correcting anyone too much for minor matters, sometimes even turning a deaf ear; not raising his eyes to heaven too often; but if he should happen to hear, for example, that God is unjust, on those occasions he must speak up. Apart from that, however, he should wait to correct those persons in private, for these people are usually quite skilled, the devil interferes, and very little is gained by doing it on the spot. What should be done, however, is to win over the butler ahead of time and get him to acknowledge the obligation his position entails of preventing evil. The Queen has chosen a man expressly for that.

"He must also foster great union and love between the master and his wife. Sometimes he has to give an admonition, if he senses that the master has confidence in him; otherwise, get the Pastor to admonish him; if some disorder slips in, the confessor, the director, or he himself sometimes has to do it.

"There was a chaplain, Messieurs, who knew from a good source that his master was planning to go off to fight a duel. After this chaplain had celebrated Holy Mass and everyone had left, he went and threw himself at the feet of his master, who was kneeling down, and said to him there, 'Monsieur, allow me in all humility to say something to you: I know you're planning to go off to fight a duel; I say to you on behalf of my God, whom I have just shown you and whom you have just adored, that, if you don't give up this bad plan, He'll exercise His justice on you and on all your posterity.' Having said that, the chaplain left him."⁴

⁴According to Abelly (bk. I, chap. VII, p. 31), Saint Vincent is supposed to have added here: "Please note the opportune moment he chose and the terms he used, which are two circumstances particularly necessary to observe on such occasions." Coste completes the scene: "The chaplain

14a. - THE SPIRIT OF FAITH OF A CHAPLAIN

To consider Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in the Lord and his Lady.

He said that he knew someone who had received great benefits for himself and for others in the house of a Lord in this social class because he always saw and honored Jesus Christ in the person of this Lord, and the Blessed Virgin in the person of the Lady. This consideration kept him simple and prudent in all his words and actions and won for him the love of this Lord, the Lady, and all the servants, and gave him the means of being very successful with this family.

15. - ADVICE TO STUDENTS LEAVING THE INTERNAL SEMINARY ¹

“The transition from the seminary to pursuing studies is a very dangerous passage during which many are shipwrecked; and if there’s any time when we should be careful, it’s the period of studies, for it’s very perilous to go from one extreme to another, just as a glass that passes from the heat of the furnace to a cold place runs the risk of breaking. It’s very important for us, therefore, to maintain ourselves in our first fervor in order to preserve the grace we’ve received and to prevent nature from getting the upper hand. If, every time we enlighten our understanding, we also try to enkindle our will, we can be sure that studying will serve us as a means to go to God; and let’s hold as an unquestionable maxim that we’ll become more capable of success in helping our neighbor in proportion as we work at our own in-

is none other than Saint Vincent himself, who was part of the Gondì household at the time. The General of the Galleys, Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondì, wanted to avenge one of his close relatives, killed in a duel by a nobleman of the Court. He thought it would enhance his honor, and, in misplaced devotion, had come to his chaplain’s Mass to implore God’s help. Shaken by the words of the saint, he generously renounced his plan. It was a difficult sacrifice. A tour of his estates and the removal of the murderer, who was sent into exile, succeeded in calming him.

Conference 14a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. VII, p. 29.

Conference 15. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XXIV, sect. I, p. 342.

¹In the Congregation of the Mission, those in formation went through the *Internal Seminary*, which corresponded to the novitiate in religious Orders. All new candidates were formed there in the practice of the virtues of their state and prepared for the lifestyle and ministries of Missioners. From there they advanced to the Major Seminary.

terior holiness. That's why, in studying in order to be of service to souls, we must be careful to fill our own souls with piety as well as knowledge and, for this purpose, to read good, helpful books and avoid reading those that serve only to satisfy our curiosity; for curiosity is the plague of the spiritual life. It was because of the curiosity of our first parents that death, plague, war, famine, and other miseries entered the world; consequently, we must beware of it as a root of all sorts of evil."

16. - RECOMMENDATIONS GIVEN AT CHAPTER¹

M. Vincent said that young people would do well to strive for holiness during their youth, for it is almost impossible for someone who has grown old in bad habits and whose soul is permeated by them to be able to rid himself of them.

He strongly urged us to be simple, especially since, where simplicity existed, God, who was simplicity personified and totally one and who did not tolerate being of two minds, was found there; *cum simplicibus sermocinatio ejus*;² besides which, the person who walks in simplicity can go forward with assurance: *qui ambulat simpliciter ambulat confidenter*.³ Consequently, those who are wily or double-dealing are always afraid that their cunning ways will be discovered and that, if they're caught by surprise, people will no longer trust them. He added that simplicity was a virtue that makes us go straight to God and to truth, without beating around the bush or being deceitful.

He also told us that it was a great means of encouragement to induce Christians to brace themselves against temptation, since, as Origen⁴ states, by acts contrary to temptation we could hurl the devil into the depths of hell instead of hurling ourselves there. Should we

Conference 16. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 214.

¹Subheading: Striving for holiness while we are young; in praise of simplicity; overcoming temptations by contrary acts.

²His communication is with the simple. Cf. Prv 3:32. (D-RB)

³He who walks honestly, walks securely. Cf. Prv 10:9. (NAB)

⁴Origen was the principal theologian of the early Greek Church. He was born in Alexandria c. 184-89 and died in Tyre c. 253-54. He is best known for his scriptural exegesis.

be tempted by pride, we must repulse the enemy, either by acts of interior humiliation or by raising our minds to God, asking Him for humility or offering Him what we are doing, so that it may please Him to give us the humility to honor His humility.

17. - RECOMMENDATIONS GIVEN AT CHAPTER¹

M. Vincent said that the most common faults of Communities, as he had perceived from a few visitations he had made in religious houses, was the waste of Community goods; and he added that we would have to give a very exact account of them before God, that they were the property of God and of the poor, and that we were only distributors, and not masters, of them. He said that we had to be attentive and even to make it a matter of conscience to put five logs on the fire when four were enough; and that we had to use only what was necessary and never go beyond that. He also said that we were to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to a fire.

18. - FAITH

“Only eternal truths are capable of filling our hearts and of guiding us with assurance. Take my word for it, all we have to do is to rely strongly and solidly on one of the perfections of God, e.g., His goodness, His Providence, His truth, His immensity, etc. As I said, we have only to be firmly established on these divine foundations in order to become perfect in a short time. It’s not that it isn’t also good to be convinced by strong, significant reasons, which can always help us, but they must be subordinate to the truths of faith. Experience teaches us that preachers who preach in conformity with the light of faith do more good in souls than those who fill their discourse with

Conference 17. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 215.

¹*Subheading*: Taking care not to waste Community goods; zeal for the spiritual needs of the neighbor.

Conference 18. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. II, p. 8, excerpt.

human and philosophical reasoning because the light of faith is always accompanied by a certain heavenly unction that diffuses itself secretly in the hearts of the listeners. From that we can judge how necessary it is, both for our own perfection and to procure the salvation of souls, to accustom ourselves to follow the light of faith always and in all things.”

19. - THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

“I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or their apparent intelligence, especially since very often they scarcely have the expression or the mind of rational persons, so crude and vulgar they are. But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people; that He scarcely had a human face in His Passion, and passed for a madman in the mind of the Gentiles and a stumbling block in the mind of the Jews. With all that, He describes himself as the Evangelizer of the poor: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.*¹ *O Dieu!* How beautiful it is to see poor people if we consider them in God and with the esteem in which Jesus Christ held them! If, however, we look on them according to the sentiments of the flesh and a worldly spirit, they will seem contemptible.”

20. - A TEMPTATION AGAINST FAITH

“I knew a famous theologian, who had long defended the Catholic faith against heretics in his capacity of Canon Theologian of a diocese. When the late Queen Marguerite sent for him to be with her because of his learning and piety, he had to leave his ministry; since he was no longer preaching or teaching catechism, he was assailed in

Conference 19. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. II, p. 9, excerpt.

¹*He sent me to bring the good news to the poor.* Cf. Lk 4:18. (NAB)

Conference 20. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, sect. I, p. 116, excerpt.

his idleness by a violent temptation against faith. This teaches us, in passing, how dangerous it is to remain idle, either in body or in mind, for just as the land, no matter how fertile it may be, if allowed to lie fallow, it immediately produces thistles and thorns, so our soul cannot remain idle very long without experiencing certain passions or temptations that lead it to do evil.

“So, when this theologian found himself in this distressing state, he came to me saying that he was troubled by very violent temptations against faith and was having horrible, blasphemous thoughts against Jesus Christ—and even of despair—to the point of feeling himself driven to jump out a window. He was reduced to such an extremity that, in the end, he had to stop praying his Breviary and celebrating Holy Mass—and even saying any prayers. So much so that, when he simply began to say the *Pater*, he seemed to see a thousand phantoms, who greatly disturbed him. His imagination was so dry, and his mind so exhausted from struggling to make acts disclaiming his temptations, that he couldn’t formulate a single prayer. Being in this pitiful state, then, it was suggested that he do the following: each and every time he turned his hand or one of his fingers toward the city of Rome or even toward some church, this gesture and act would mean that he believed everything the Roman Church believed. And what happened after all that? God finally had mercy on that poor theologian; when he fell sick, he was instantly delivered from all his temptations. The blindfold of obscurity was suddenly removed from his eyes and his mind; he began to see all the truths of faith, but with such clarity that he seemed to feel and touch them with his finger.¹ He finally died, lovingly thanking God for allowing him to fall into those temptations, for raising him up so successfully from them, and for giving him such great, admirable dispositions regarding the Mysteries of our religion.”

¹Abelly attributes this happy outcome to the prayers of Saint Vincent and to his act of charity in offering himself to God to be tempted in place of the theologian. The saint did, in fact, suffer a severe assault against his faith, from this interior struggle, lasting three or four years, he emerged greatly strengthened.

21. - CONVERSION OF A HERETIC

One day Saint Vincent told his Community the story of the conversion of a heretic, whom he himself had brought to the true faith. Before giving in, the Huguenot asked the saint to clear up an objection: “You told me, Monsieur, that the Church of Rome is led by the Holy Spirit, but I find that hard to believe because, on the one hand, we see the rural Catholics abandoned to Pastors who are ignorant and given over to vice, with so little instruction in their duties that most of them hardly know what the Christian religion is. On the other, we see towns filled with priests and monks who are doing nothing; there are perhaps ten thousand of them in Paris, yet they leave the poor country people in this appalling state of ignorance in which they are lost. And you want to convince me that all this is being guided by the Holy Spirit! I’ll never believe it.”

Deeply impressed by this objection, the saint replied to the heretic that “he was ill-informed regarding the matter they were discussing; that there were many parishes there with good Pastors and priests; that among the numerous clergy and monks in the cities, several were going to the country to catechize and preach; that others were devoted to meditation and to chanting the praises of God day and night; that still others were very helpful in serving the people by the books they write, the doctrine they teach, and the sacraments they administer; and if there were a few useless ones who did not carry out their obligations as they should, these were individual men subject to human frailty, and they are not the Church. When we say that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, that means generally speaking, when it meets in the Councils, and also privately, when the faithful follow the inspirations of faith and the rules of Christian justice. As for those who stray from that, however, they are resisting the Holy Spirit, and, even though they may be members of the Church, they are, nevertheless, among those who live according to the flesh, as Saint Paul says, and they will die.”

The heretic wasn't convinced. The following year, Vincent de Paul returned to Montmirail with M. Féron,¹ at that time a Bachelor of Theology, and later a Doctor of the Sorbonne and Archdeacon of Chartres; M. Duchesne,² a Doctor at the same faculty and Archdeacon of Beauvais; and some priests and religious among his friends. He was coming to give the mission in that place and in the neighboring villages. The heretic was curious enough to attend the sermons and catechism lessons; he saw the care that was taken to instruct those who did not know the truths necessary for their salvation, the charity with which the priests adapted themselves to the weakness and slowness of mind of the most unrefined, and the marvelous effects the zeal of the Missioners brought about in the heart of the greatest sinners. Moved to tears, he went to find the saint and said to him, "Now I see that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Roman Church, since such care is taken in the instruction and salvation of poor village people; I'm ready to enter it whenever it will please you to receive me." "Don't you have any more difficulties?" asked the saint. "No," replied the heretic, freed from his erroneous beliefs, "I believe everything you told me and am ready to renounce all my errors publicly."

The saint questioned him, and, after assuring himself that the new convert knew well the essential points of Catholic doctrine, he informed him that he would accept his abjuration, and the following Sunday would absolve him from heresy in the church of Marchais, near Montmirail, where the mission was then taking place. That day, at the conclusion of the morning sermon, Vincent de Paul called the convert aloud by name and asked him publicly if he was still prepared to abjure his errors. After replying affirmatively, the former Calvinist added, pointing to a roughly carved statue of the Blessed

¹Blaise Le Féron, born in Chartres (Eure-et-Loir), was named Abbot of Saint-Lomer in Blois; accused of Jansenism, he was not accepted for the office. He became Vicar-General of Chartres in 1652, died in 1659, and was buried in Sainte-Foy (cf. Abbé Joseph Beauhaire, *Diocèse de Chartres. Chronologie* . . . 1892, p. 9).

²Jérôme Duchesne became a member of the Community of Saint-Nicolas in 1612. In 1621 he gave the mission with Saint Vincent in Montmirail. (Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XIII, p. 55.)

Virgin in the church,³ “I can’t believe that there’s any power in that stone.” “The Church doesn’t teach that there’s any power in these material images,” replied the saint, “except when God is pleased to impart it to them, as He can and did do in the past to the rod of Moses that brought about so many miracles, which the children themselves could explain to him.” Thereupon, addressing one of the brightest, he asked him what the Church taught about sacred images. The child replied “that it was good to have them and to give them the honor due them, not because of the material of which they are made, but because they represent to us Our Lord Jesus Christ, His glorious Mother, and the other saints of paradise, who, having triumphed over the world, invite us, through these silent figures, to follow them in their faith and good works.”

That was an excellent answer. The saint repeated the child’s words and had his listener admit that they cleared up completely the difficulty he had raised. He postponed to another day the ceremony of abjuration to give the faith of the new convert time to be affirmed. It was, in fact, affirmed and so well affirmed that, after the public profession of Catholicism nothing could shake him. “Oh! What a happiness for our Missioners,” added Saint Vincent after this story, “to verify the guidance of the Holy Spirit on His Church by working, as we do, at the instruction and sanctification of poor persons!”

22. - MONSIEUR VINCENT’S FEAR FOR HIS FAITH

“All my life I’ve been afraid of finding myself at the start of some heresy. I saw the great havoc wrought by that of Luther and Calvin and how many persons of all kinds and conditions had sucked in its pernicious venom by wanting to taste the false sweetness of their so-called Reformation. I’ve always been afraid of finding myself en-

³The relic room in the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission (95 rue de Sèvres, Paris), houses a fourteenth-century bust of the Blessed Virgin. It is believed that this is the head of the statue mentioned here. (Cf. A. Loth, *Saint Vincent de Paul et sa mission sociale* [Paris: Dumoulin, 1880], p. 213.)

Conference 22. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. XII, p. 409, excerpt.

veloped in the errors of some new doctrine before realizing it. Yes, I've feared that all my life."

23. - TRUST IN GOD

"Let's trust in God, my dear confreres, but let our trust be total and perfect, and let's rest assured that, having begun His work in us, He will complete it; for, I ask you, who has established the Company? Who has set us to work in the missions, or with those preparing for ordination, or the conferences, or retreats, etc.? Is it I? No way! Is it M. Portail, whom God associated with me from the beginning? Not at all, for we weren't thinking of all that and had made no plan for it. So then, who is the author of all that? It's God, it's His paternal Providence and sheer goodness. For we're only insignificant workers and poor ignorant men; and few or none among us are noble, powerful, learned persons or men capable of anything. So, it's God who has done all that and has brought it about through whatever persons He has seen fit, so that all the glory may revert to Him. So, let's put all our trust in Him; for, if we put it in human persons or rely on some advantage of nature or fortune, then God will withdraw from us. But someone will say that we have to make friends both for ourselves and for the Company. O my dear confreres, let's be very wary of listening to this way of thinking, for we'd be deluded by it. Let's seek God alone, and He'll provide us with friends and with everything else, so much so that we'll lack nothing. Do you want to know why we won't be successful in a certain ministry? It's because we rely on ourselves. This preacher, that Superior, or that confessor relies too much on his own prudence, knowledge, and intelligence. And what does God do? He withdraws from him and leaves him on his own; and even though he works, whatever he does produces no fruit, in order to make him aware of his own uselessness and so that he'll learn from personal experience that, whatever talent he may have, he can do nothing without God."

24. - TRUST IN GOD

“The true Missioner mustn’t be concerned about the goods of this world but cast all his cares on the Providence of the Lord, holding for certain that, as long as he’s firmly grounded in charity and well anchored in this trust, he’ll always be under the protection of God; consequently, no harm will befall him and he’ll lack no good thing, even when he thinks that, judging from appearances, all is going to be lost. I’m not saying this as coming from myself; it’s Holy Scripture that teaches it to us and states that *Qui habitat in adiutorio Altissimi, in protectione Dei caeli commorabitur*; ¹ he who dwells under the sign of trust in God will always be favored by special protection on His part. In that state, he must hold for certain that no harm will befall him because all things work together for his good, and he’ll want for no good thing, especially since, when God himself gives himself to him, He brings with Him all the good things necessary for both body and soul. Therefore, my dear confreres, you have to hope that, as long as you remain firm in this trust, not only will you be preserved from all evil and all disturbing incidents, but will also be showered with all sorts of good things.”

25. - LOVE OF GOD

“Let us love God, brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows; for very often many acts of love of God, of devotion, and of other similar affections and interior practices of a tender heart, although very good and desirable, are, nevertheless, very suspect if they don’t translate into the practice of effective love. ‘By this,’ says Our Lord, ‘is my Father glorified, that you may bear much fruit.’¹ We have to be very careful about

Conference 24. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. III, sect. III, p. 26, excerpt.

¹*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will remain in the protection of the God of heaven.* Cf. Ps 91:1. (NAB)

Conference 25. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XIX, p. 81, excerpt.

¹Cf. Jn 15:8. (NAB)

that; for there are many who, recollected exteriorly, and filled with lofty sentiments of God interiorly, stop at that, and when it comes to the point of doing something, and they have the opportunity to act, they come up short. They flatter themselves with their ardent imagination; they're satisfied with the sweet conversations they have with God in meditation and even speak of them like angels; but when they leave there, if there's a question of working for God, of suffering, of mortifying themselves, of instructing poor persons, of going in search of the lost sheep, of being happy when they lack something, or of accepting sickness or some other misfortune, alas! they're no longer around; their courage fails them. No, no, let's not fool ourselves: *Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.*²

“This is so true that the holy Apostle declares to us that only our works accompany us into the other life. So, let's reflect on that, especially since, in this century there are many who seem virtuous—and who actually are—but, nevertheless, are more inclined to a soft, easy way than to a painstaking, solid devotion. The Church is compared to a great harvest that requires workers, but hardworking ones. Nothing is more in conformity with the Gospel than to gather light and strength for our soul in meditation, reading, and solitude on the one hand, and then to go out and share this spiritual nourishment with others. This is to do as Our Lord did, and His Apostles after Him; it's to unite the office of Martha to that of Mary and to imitate the dove, which half digests the food it has eaten and then uses its beak to put the rest into that of its babies in order to feed them. That's what we should do, that's how we should witness to God by our works that we love Him. *Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.*”

²*All our work consists in action.*

26. - LOVE OF GOD¹

“We’ll use these words from today’s Gospel,² which speak to us of love, as the topic for our discussion of the love Our Lord asks of us. We’ll divide it into three points: in the first we’ll give the motives we have to love Jesus Christ; in the second, we’ll say in what this love consists, giving a sign of it and a few effects; and in the third, we’ll talk about a means of entering into this love, and, if we’re already there, of becoming more firmly established in it. We’ll do this if we’re animated by the Holy Spirit, who is the Love uniting the Persons of the Blessed Trinity within itself and who unites souls to the Most Blessed Trinity. For this intention, let’s make an interior act of recourse to the Blessed Virgin and say, *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis*.

“*What motives do we have to love Our Lord?*”

“To know this, we must reflect on Our Lord as God and as man. As God alone, who He was before He became man, He has commanded us to love Him: *Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua*³ because He has created us, etc. What an honor God has bestowed on us in commanding us to love Him! says one of the saints. It would be sufficient if, by a special grace, He permitted us to love Him.

“To recognize how great is our obligation to God in this Commandment, we must consider God as the King of Kings, the Monarch of heaven and earth, etc., our creator and preserver, etc., and consider man as a little earthworm, or, to put it better, a tiny atom in comparison with God.

“We must consider Our Lord both as God and as man. We must love Him in this capacity: (1) because He became man for love of us and to reconcile us with His Father, whose good graces we had lost

Conference 26. - Repetitions of Prayer, Conferences, and Talks to the Missioners, MS, f^o 1ff., outline of a conference.

¹ Subheading: *Si quis diligit me, sermonem meum servabit, et Pater meus diligit eum et ad eum veniemus et mansionem apud eum faciemus.* (Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.) Cf. Jn 14:23. (NAB)

² For Pentecost Sunday.

³ *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* Cf. Mt 22:37. (NAB)

because of the sin of our first father; (2) because He merited for us by His life, Passion, and death the paradise we had lost; (3) to help us to see the eternal Father in Him: *Philippe, qui videt me, videt et Patrem*,⁴ and the lifestyle we must lead in order to please Him, etc.

“To know how great this benefit is. We’ll do this if we reflect that, through Him, from the children of iniquity that we were, we have become children of God; from being deserving of hell, we have become worthy of possessing eternal glory.

“The third motive is that Saint Paul fulminates a curse against those who do not love Jesus Christ.

“In what does this love consist?”

“To love someone, strictly speaking, is to wish him well. In line with that, to love Our Lord means that He wants His name to be made known and revealed to everyone, that He may reign over the earth, and that His Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

“Now, it must be noted that love is divided into affective and effective love. Affective love is a certain outpouring from the one who loves to the loved one, or a pleasure and tender feeling one has for the thing loved, as a father has for his child, etc. Effective love consists in doing the things the loved person commands or desires; it’s this sort of love of which I’m speaking and of which Our Lord spoke: *Si quis diligit me, sermonem meum servabit*.⁵

“The sign of this love, the effect or sign of this love, Messieurs, is the one Our Lord mentions, namely, that those who love Him keep His word. Now, the word of God consists in teachings and counsels. We’ll give a sign of our love if we love His teaching and profess to teach it to others. According to that, the state of the Mission⁶ is a state of love, since of itself it’s concerned with the teaching and counsels of Jesus Christ. Not only that, but it also professes to lead the world to the love and esteem of Our Lord.

“Advantages:

“If we love Our Lord, we’ll be loved by His Father, which is as much as to say that His Father will wish us well, and will do that in

⁴*Philip, who sees me, also sees the Father.* Cf. Jn 14:9. (NAB)

⁵*If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.* Cf. Jn 14:23. (NAB)

⁶Saint Vincent often refers to the Congregation of the Mission as simply “the Mission.”

two ways: first, He'll take pleasure in us, as a father with his child; second, He'll give us His graces of faith, hope, and charity by the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, who will dwell in our souls, just as He gave it today to the Apostles and enabled them to perform the miracles they did.

"The second advantage of loving Our Lord is that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come into the soul that loves Our Lord: (1) through the enlightenment of our understanding; (2) through the interior intuitions They give us of Their love by inspirations, the Sacraments, etc.

"The third effect of Our Lord's love is that not only God the Father loves these souls, and the Persons of the Blessed Trinity come into them, but They also remain in them. Therefore, the soul of the person who loves Our Lord is the dwelling place of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the place where the Father perpetually begets His Son and the Holy Spirit constantly proceeds from the Father and the Son.

"There are some who are loved by the Father and to whom the three Persons come, but don't remain there because those souls don't persevere in loving Our Lord; they also grow lax in the esteem they had for His teaching and for living according to His counsels and the examples He has left us. We loved Him for a year or two in the beginning of our conversion, but we let nature get the upper hand, so we're living according to our own inclinations, etc.

"Means:

"(1) Meditation on the life and death of Our Lord;

"(2) Reading the New Testament;

"(3) Turning our understanding and will away from the esteem of creatures by mortification, and doing our best to persevere in the imitation of Our Lord."

27. - CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD

One day Vincent de Paul explained to his Community the difference between a state in which God places a person and the one into which He allows the person to fall. The first occurs by God's Will, and the other happens only with His permission. For example, a state of loss, sickness, contradiction, boredom, or dryness comes absolutely by God's Will; but one in which there is sin and contravention to the orders given us on His behalf occurs by His permission. For the latter, we have to humble ourselves when we fall into it, doing our utmost, nevertheless, with God's grace to lift ourselves up and to prevent ourselves from falling into it again. "But, we have to accept the first state, regardless of what it is, because it comes from the Will of God, and we have to resign ourselves to the good pleasure of God to bear with what He pleases and as long as it pleases Him. This, my dear confreres, is the great lesson of the Son of God; and those who are docile to it, and enshrine it well in their hearts, are first class students in the school of this Divine Master. As for me, I know nothing more holy or more perfect than this resignation, when it leads to a total stripping of self and to genuine indifference with regard to all sorts of states in whatever way we're placed in them, sin excepted. So, let's hold fast to that, and ask God to grant us the grace to remain constantly in this state of indifference."

28. - CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD

"Consider the very holy dispositions in which [the Christian submissive to the Will of God] spends his life, and the blessings attached to all that he does: he adheres only to God, and God is the one who guides him everywhere and in everything, so he can say with the Prophet, *Tenuisti manum dexteram meam, et in voluntate tua deduxisti me.*¹ God holds him by the right hand, as it were; by their

Conference 27. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. V, sect. II, p. 41, excerpt.

Conference 28. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. 5, sect. I, p. 40, excerpt.

¹You have hold of my right hand; and have led me by your will. Cf. Ps 73:23-24. (NAB)

holding on to one another with entire submission to this divine guidance, you'll see him tomorrow, the day after, all week long, all year long, in a word, throughout his life, peaceful and tranquil, zealously tending constantly toward God and always spreading in the souls of his neighbor the gentle, beneficent effects of the Spirit that animates him. If you compare him with people who follow their own inclinations, you'll see his ways of acting reflecting a brilliant light, and always fruitful in results: a notable progress in his person, a strength and energy in all his words. God gives a special blessing to all his endeavors, and bestows His graces on the plans he undertakes for Him and the advice he gives to others. All his actions are very edifying. On the other hand, however, we see that persons attached to their own inclinations and pleasures have only earthly thoughts, speaking like slaves and having only lifeless works. This difference comes from the fact that the latter are attached to creatures, and the former separates himself from them; nature acts in those contemptible souls, and grace acts in those who raise themselves to God and breathe only His Will."

29. - CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD

At a time when illness was threatening to take several of his priests from him, especially one of the most worthy members of the Company, the saint said to his Community, "We pray that God will be pleased to preserve him; nevertheless, we submit entirely to His Divine Will; for it's true that we must believe that not only his illness but also the illness of the others, and, in a word, all that happens to the Company, comes about only by His holy guidance and for the benefit of the same Company. That's why, in asking God to restore health to the sick and to provide for other needs, it may always be on condition that such is His good pleasure and His greater glory."

30. - THE MAJESTY AND HOLINESS OF GOD

“Brothers, let’s strive to conceive a great—a very great—esteem for the majesty and holiness of God. If our mind’s eye were powerful enough to penetrate ever so little into the immensity of His sovereign excellence, *Jésus!* with what lofty sentiments we’d be filled! We could easily say, as did Saint Paul, that eyes have never seen, nor ears ever heard, nor mind imagine anything comparable to it.¹ God is an abyss of perfections, an eternal, very holy, very pure, very perfect, and infinitely glorious Being, an infinite Good who encompasses all goods and is incomprehensible in himself. Now, this knowledge we have, that God is infinitely elevated above all kinds of knowledge and all created understanding, should suffice for us to make us esteem Him infinitely, to annihilate ourselves in His presence, and to cause us to speak of His Supreme Majesty with a great sentiment of reverence and submission; and in proportion as we esteem Him, we will also love Him, and this love will produce in us an insatiable desire to acknowledge His benefits and to procure true adorers for Him.”

31. - THE SERVICE OF GOD

“Whoever tries to save his life, brothers, will lose it: Jesus Christ is the one who declares that to us, and He tells us that a person can make no greater act of love than to give his life for his friend. *Eh, quoi!* Can we have a better friend than God! Must we not love all that He loves and, for love of Him, consider our neighbor as our friend! Wouldn’t we be unworthy of enjoying the existence God gives us, if we were to refuse to use it for such a worthy reason? Acknowledging that our life comes from His generous hand, we’d cer-

Conference 30. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VIII, p. 68, excerpt.

¹Cf. 1 Cor 2:9. (NAB)

Conference 31. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VIII, sect. II, p. 89, excerpt.

tainly commit an injustice if we refused to use it and to consume it according to His plans, in imitation of His Son Our Lord.”

32. - RESPECT FOR THE RELICS OF SAINTS

Every year, during the Rogation Days,¹ the Canons of Notre-Dame had the custom of carrying in procession through the streets of the capital the principal relics of their Treasury, and the church of Saint-Lazare was one of the ones they used to visit. On the eve of one of these processions, Vincent de Paul said to his Community, “We will place ourselves in the disposition of welcoming these precious relics as if they were the saints themselves, who do us the honor of coming to visit us. In this way we’ll honor God in His saints and will entreat Him to give us a share of the graces He poured so abundantly into their souls.”

33. - SIMPLICITY

“God is very simple, or, rather, He’s Simplicity personified; consequently, where there’s simplicity, there God is also found; and, as the Wise Man says,¹ the person who walks simply, walks with assurance; whereas, on the contrary, those who are wily and practice duplicity are in constant fear that their craftiness will be discovered, and that, if people catch them in their deception, they’ll no longer be willing to trust them.”

Conference 32. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. IX, p. 94, excerpt.

¹Rogation days, the three days that immediately precede Ascension Thursday, are days on which a procession of penance and supplication is held.

Conference 33. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XV, p. 242, excerpt.

¹*He who walks honestly, walks securely, but he whose ways are crooked will fare badly.* Cf. Prov 10:9. (NAB)

34. - SIMPLICITY IN PREACHING

“When the Company is working in the missions, it must give itself to God to explain by familiar comparisons the truths of the Gospel. So, let’s strive to form our minds to this method, imitating in that Our Lord, who, as the holy Evangelist states, *sine parabolis non loquebatur ad eos*.¹ Let’s be judicious about using passages from profane authors in our preaching; in addition, this should be done only to serve as a stepping stone to Holy Scripture.”

34a. - SIMPLICITY WITH CRAFTY PERSONS

“You’re going to an area where it’s said that the inhabitants are, for the most part, shrewd and crafty. Now, if that’s the case, the best means to help them is to act very simply with them; for the maxims of the Gospel are totally opposed to worldly ways of acting, and since you’re going for the service of Our Lord, you must also act according to His Spirit, which is a spirit of straightforwardness and simplicity.”

34b. - PRUDENCE IN CONVERSATIONS

“One of the effects of prudence and wisdom is not only to speak well and to say good things, but also to say them at the right time so that they may be well received and beneficial to the persons to whom we speak. Our Lord gave the example of this on several occasions, especially when He was speaking to the Samaritan woman and used the opportunity of the water she had just drawn to speak to her about grace and to inspire her with the desire of perfect conversion.”¹

Conference 34. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. I, §2, p. 9, excerpt.

¹*He spoke to them only in parables.* Cf. Mt 13:34. (NAB)

Conference 34a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XV, p. 242, advice given to a Missioner.

Conference 34b. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XVI, sect. I, p. 252.

¹Cf. Jn 4:4-43. (NAB)

35. - PRUDENCE

“It’s characteristic of this virtue to regulate and guide words and actions. Prudence helps us to speak wisely and at the right time, causing us to converse discreetly and judiciously of things that are good in their nature and circumstances and to keep silent about and suppress those that are contrary to God or which may harm the neighbor or tend to our own praise or to some other bad end. This same virtue makes us act considerately, in a mature way, and with a good motive in whatever we do, not only regarding the substance of the action, but also regarding the circumstances, so that the prudent man acts in the way he should, when he should, and for the purpose he should. The imprudent man, on the contrary, pays no attention to the manner, the time, or the proper motives, and that’s where he’s at fault, whereas the prudent man, acting discreetly, weighs and measures everything.

“Prudence and simplicity have the same goal and aim, which is to speak and act well in the sight of God. Since one cannot exist without the other, Our Lord recommended them both together.¹ I’m well aware that we’ll find a difference between these two virtues by rational distinction; but, in truth, they’re very closely connected both in their substance and in their purpose. Prudence of the flesh and the world has for its goal the pursuit of honors, pleasures, and wealth; therefore, it’s totally opposed to Christian prudence and simplicity, which distance us from these misleading benefits, helping us to espouse solid, lasting benefits. They’re like two good sisters who are inseparable, and are so necessary for our spiritual advancement that the man who knew how to make use of them properly would doubtless amass great treasures of grace and merits....²

“So, it’s characteristic of prudence to govern our words and actions. In addition to that, however, it has another job, which is to choose means suitable for attaining the goal we set for ourselves.

Conference 35. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XVI, pp. 247ff., excerpt.

¹Cf. Mt 10:16. (NAB)

²According to Coste, Abelly adds twenty-six lines here, obviously taken from the conference of March 14, 1659, despite some changes in form.

Since this goal is simply to go to God, it takes the straightest and surer paths to get us there. We're not talking here about political and worldly prudence, which, aiming only at temporal and sometimes unjust successes, also uses only very dubious and uncertain human means. We're talking about that holy prudence Our Lord advises in the Gospel, causing us to choose the right means to attain the goal He proposes to us. Since it's totally divine, it requires means in proportion and in relation to it. Now, we can choose means adapted to the goal we propose to ourselves in two ways: either by our reasoning alone, which is often very poor, or by the maxims of faith that Jesus Christ has taught us, which are always infallible, and which we can use with no fear of error. That's why true prudence submits our reason to these maxims and gives us as an inviolable rule that we always judge everything as Our Lord judged them. The result is that, when the occasions arise, we may ask ourselves, 'How did Our Lord judge such or such a thing? How did He act in such or such a circumstance? What did He say and do regarding certain matters?' and thus we may adapt our whole way of acting in accord with His maxims and examples. So then, let's take this resolution, Messieurs, and walk confidently along this royal road on which Jesus Christ will be our leader and guide, remembering that He has said that heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away.³ Let's bless Our Lord, brothers, strive to think and judge as He did, and do what He recommended by His words and examples. Let's enter into His Spirit to adopt His ways of acting; for doing good isn't everything; it must be done well, in imitation of Our Lord, of whom it is said, *Bene omnia fecit*: He has done all things well.⁴ No, it's not enough to fast, to observe the Rules, to carry out the ministries of the Mission; but we must do this in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, with perfection, for the purpose, and in the way He did them. So, Christian prudence consists in judging, speaking, and working as the Eternal Wisdom of God, clothed in our weak flesh, judged, spoke, and worked."

³Cf. Mt 24:35. (NAB)

⁴Cf. Mk 7:37. (NAB)

36. - HUMILITY

“It’s a good practice to get down to particulars in humbling matters, when prudence allows us to admit them openly, because of the benefit we draw from this, overcoming our repugnance to reveal what pride might want to keep hidden. Saint Augustine himself made public the secret sins of his youth, writing a book about them so that the whole world might know all the foolishness of his errors and the excesses of his unruly conduct. And didn’t that vessel of election, Saint Paul, the great Apostle who was ravished to heaven, admit that he had persecuted the Church? He even put it in writing ¹ so that, even until the end of time, people might know that he had been a persecutor. Indeed, if we don’t watch carefully over ourselves and do violence to ourselves to acknowledge our faults and failings, we’ll say only the things that can give people a good opinion of us, and we’ll conceal those that cause us shame. That’s what we inherited from our first parent Adam, who, after offending God, went and hid himself.

“At various times I’ve made the visitation of certain religious houses, and have often asked many of the nuns to which virtue they were most attracted and valued most highly. I even asked those whom I know were more put off by humiliations. Among twenty of them, however, I hardly found a single one who didn’t say that it was humility, so true it is that everyone finds this virtue beautiful and lovable. How is it, then, that so few people practice it and even fewer have it? It’s because we’re content to think about it but don’t take the trouble to acquire it. It’s delightful to speculate on it, but in practice it has an aspect that’s distasteful to nature; and its practices are displeasing to us because they lead us to choose always the lowest place, to put ourselves beneath others, to endure calumnies, to seek contempt, and to love abjection—things to which we naturally have an aversion. Therefore, we have to overcome this repugnance, and each of us has to make an effort to really practice this virtue; otherwise,

Conference 36. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, sect II, p. 221. Repetition of Prayer. The confreere on whom Saint Vincent called for his Repetition of Prayer before he began his conference had acknowledged in all simplicity that an anxiety had prevented him from meditating during the period of prayer.

¹Cf. 1 Cor 15:9. (NAB)

we'll never acquire it. I'm well aware that, by the grace of God, some among us do practice this divine virtue, and not only do they not think highly of themselves, their talents, their knowledge, or their virtue, but they consider themselves very wretched, want to be recognized as such, and put themselves beneath all creatures. I must confess that I never see these persons that they don't put me to shame; for they make me a secret reproach of the pride within me, abominable man that I am. As for these souls, however, they're always content, and their joy even shines forth in their expression because the Holy Spirit, who dwells in them, fills them with peace, with the result that nothing can trouble them. If they're contradicted, they accept it; if they're calumniated, they bear with it; if they're overlooked, they think that's only right; if they're overburdened with work, they do it willingly; and no matter how difficult an order may be, they carry it out willingly, relying on the virtue of holy obedience. The temptations that come to them serve only to strengthen them even more in humility, cause them to turn to God, and, in this way, make them victorious over the devil; consequently, they have no enemy to combat but pride, which never gives us any respite in this life but attacks in various ways even the greatest saints on earth, prompting some to vain complacency in the good they've done, and others in the knowledge they've acquired. The latter are led to presume that they're the most enlightened, and the former to think themselves the best and most steadfast.

“That's why we have very good reason to ask God to be pleased to protect and preserve us from this insidious vice, which is all the more to be feared because all of us are naturally inclined to it. Then, too, we have to be on the watch and do the opposite of what corrupt nature tries to prompt us to do: if it raises us up, let's abase ourselves; if it prompts us to desires of self-esteem, let's reflect on our weakness; if it's a desire to be noticed, let's hide what can cause people to notice us, and prefer lowly, vile actions to those that are showy and respected. In a word, let's often have recourse to love of our own abjection, which is a sure refuge for keeping ourselves safe from similar disturbances that our unfortunate propensity to pride constantly raises in us. Let's ask Our Lord to be pleased to draw us after Him by

the merit of the adorable humiliations of His life and death. Let each and every one of us offer Him, in solidarity with one another, all the humiliations we can practice, and be prompted to this practice by the sole motive of honoring Him and humbling ourselves.”

37. - HUMILITY

“Humility is such a broad virtue, but so difficult and necessary, that we can’t reflect on it enough. It’s the virtue of Jesus Christ, of his holy Mother, of the greatest saints, and, in a word, it’s the virtue of Missioners. But what am I saying? I take that back, I’d like us to have it; and when I say that it’s the virtue of Missioners, I mean that it’s the virtue they need the most and must ardently desire; for this insignificant Company, the least of all, must be founded only on humility as on its characteristic virtue; otherwise, we’ll never do anything worthwhile within or outside the Company. Without humility, we mustn’t expect to make any progress for ourselves or benefit for the neighbor. O Savior, give us this holy virtue, which is characteristic of You, and which You brought into the world and love so much. And you, Messieurs, know that anyone who wants to be a true Missioner must constantly strive to acquire this virtue and make progress in it, being careful above all to banish all thoughts of pride, ambition, and vanity, as being the greatest enemies he can have. As soon as they appear, he must rush upon them to uproot them, and keep a close watch so as not to give them any opening. Yes, I say it again, that if we are genuine Missioners, each one of us must be willing to be considered poor, insignificant creatures, men lacking virtue, treated as ignorant persons who are insulted and despised, reproached for our failings, and made known publicly as unbearable men because of our faults and imperfections.”¹

Conference 37. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, sect. II, p. 218, excerpt.

¹According to Coste, what follows these words in Abelly is taken from the conference of April 18, 1659.

38. - HUMILITY

“Truly, my dear confreres, if each and every one of us is willing to strive to know himself well, he’ll find that it’s quite proper and reasonable to despise himself. For if, on the one hand, we seriously consider the corruption of our nature, the inconstancy of our mind, the darkness of our understanding, the intractability of our will, and the impurity of our affections; if, furthermore, we examine thoroughly our works and activities, we’ll find that all of that is worthy of contempt. *‘Mais quoi!’* you’ll say to me, ‘Do you include in that number the sermons we’ve preached, the confessions we’ve heard, the care and trouble we’ve taken for our neighbor and the service of Our Lord?’ Yes, Messieurs, if we review the best actions, we’ll find that in most of them we’ve acted badly as to the way we did them, and often in our intention, and that, no matter how we look at them, there may be as much bad as good in them; for, will you please tell me what can be expected from human frailty? What can nothingness produce and sin do? What else do we have of ourselves except nothingness and sin? So, let’s hold it as certain that, in everything and everywhere, we’re worthy of being disdained and are always very despicable because of our natural opposition to holiness and the other perfections of God, and to the life of Jesus Christ and the operations of His grace. What convinces us more strongly of this truth is our natural, constant inclination to evil, our powerlessness to do good, and the experience all of us have that, even when we think we’ve succeeded well in some action or that our advice has been well received, just the opposite happens, and God often allows us to be held in contempt. If then, we strive to know ourselves well, we’ll find that in everything we think, say, and do, either in the substance or in the circumstances, we’re filled with, and surrounded by, reasons for shame and contempt; and, if we don’t try to flatter ourselves, we’ll see that we’re not only more wicked than other men but, in a certain sense, worse than the devils in hell; for, if those unfortunate beings had at their disposal the graces and means given

to us to become better, they'd make a million times better use of them than we do."

39. - HUMILITY

One day Vincent de Paul said that we should never reflect or dwell on anything good in ourselves but strive to know what is bad or faulty in us, and that this was a great means to preserve humility. Neither the gift of converting souls, he added, nor all the other external talents we had were for ourselves, that we were only their street porters, and with all that we could very well be damned; consequently, no one should flatter himself, or be complacent, or have any self-esteem about that, seeing that God works great things by His own means; but we should humble ourselves all the more and recognize that we're puny instruments that God deigns to use, as He did with the rod of Moses, which worked wonders and miracles and was, however, only a poor rod and a fragile stick of wood.

40. - HUMILITY

"Isn't it strange how clearly we see that individuals in a Company, like Peter, James, and John, should shun honor and love contempt, but the Company, people say, and the Community, have to acquire and preserve esteem and honor in the world? For, I ask you, how can it be that Peter, James, and John truly and sincerely love and seek contempt, and that, nevertheless, the Company, which is composed of only Peter, James, John, and other individuals, must love and seek honor? We must certainly acknowledge and admit that these two things are incompatible; therefore, all Missioners must be content not only when they find themselves personally in some situation of

Conference 39. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, sect. II, p. 226, excerpt

Conference 40. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, p. 200, excerpt

abjection or contempt, but also when someone looks down on their Company; for that will be a sign that they're truly humble."

40a. - HUMILITY

"Brothers, let's be like that peasant who was carrying the baggage of Saint Ignatius and his travel-weary companions and, seeing that they knelt down when they arrived in some place where they were stopping, he did the same; seeing them pray, he also prayed; and when those holy persons asked him one time what he was doing there, he replied, 'I'm asking God to do what you're requesting of Him. I'm like a poor animal who doesn't know how to pray; I ask Him to hear you. I'd like to say to Him what you say to Him, but I don't know how, so I'm offering your prayers to Him.'

"My dear confreres, we must consider ourselves as the porters of those worthy workers, as poor idiots who don't know how to express ourselves and are the refuse of others, and as lowly gleaners who come after those great harvesters. Let's thank God that He has been pleased to accept our humble services in that. Let's offer Him, together with our little handfuls, the great harvests of others, and let's always be ready to do whatever we can for the service of God and the assistance of our neighbor. If God gave such beautiful enlightenment and such a great grace to that poor peasant mentioned in that story, let's hope that, by doing our utmost, as he did, to contribute to seeing God honored and served, His Divine Goodness will graciously accept our offerings and bless our modest labors."

40b. - HUMILITY

“Pay attention to Our Lord’s recommendation to us in these words: ‘Learn of me that I am humble of heart,’¹ and beg Him to help you to understand them. If He sets us afire ever so little with the desire for humiliations, that will suffice, even though we may not have the knowledge of this virtue that Our Lord did, who knew the connection it has with the perfections of God His Father and the repulsiveness of the human sinner. It’s true that we’ll never see that in this life other than only very obscurely, but we must, nevertheless, have confidence in the midst of darkness that, if our heart is attached to humiliations, God will give us humility, preserve us in it, and increase it in us by the acts He’ll cause us to make of it. For an act of virtue that’s well done disposes us to do another well, and the first degree of humility serves to rise to the second, the second to the third, and so on for the others.”

41. - HUMILIATIONS

“What is the life of this Divine Savior if not one constant humiliation, active and passive? He so loved it that He never was without it during His life on earth; and even after His death He willed that the Church represent His Divine Person to us by the figure of a crucifix in order to appear to our eyes in a state of ignominy, having been hanged for us like a criminal and suffering the most shameful, infamous death imaginable. And why? Because He knew the excellence of humiliations and the malice of the contrary sin, which not only makes the other sins worse, but makes works imperfect that aren’t bad in themselves, and which can infect and corrupt those that are good, even the holiest ones.”

Conference 40b. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, pp. 219-20, excerpt.

¹Cf. Mt 11:29. (NAB)

Conference 41. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, sect. II, p. 217, excerpt

42. - AMBITION

“God hasn’t sent us to have honorable posts and ministries, or to act or speak pompously and authoritatively, but to serve and evangelize poor persons and to carry out the other activities of our Institute in a humble, gentle, and friendly way. That’s why we can apply to ourselves what Saint John Chrysostom said in one of his homilies that, as long as we remain sheep by a genuine, sincere humility, not only will we not be devoured by wolves but we’ll even convert them into sheep. On the contrary, from the moment we stray from the humility and simplicity characteristic of our Institute, we’ll lose the grace attached to them, and we won’t find any in brilliant actions. Indeed, isn’t it only right that a Missioner who has become worthy in his modest profession of the blessing of heaven and the approval and esteem of others, be deprived of one and the other when he lets himself take on works that smack of the spirit of the world by the prestige he seeks in them and which are opposed to the spirit of his state? Isn’t there reason to fear that he may vanish in broad daylight and fall into disorder, in line with what’s said of the servant who became the master, that he became, at the same time, proud and unbearable? The late Cardinal de Bérulle,¹ that great servant of God, was accustomed to

Conference 42. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, sect. II, p. 225, excerpt.

¹Pierre de Bérulle was born in the Château de Cérilly (Yonne) on February 4, 1575. Ordained a priest in 1599, he was appointed chaplain to King Henry IV shortly afterward. His skill in controversy enabled him to bring several important persons back to the Church, among others the Comte de Laval, the Baron de Salignac, and a judge of the Parlement of Paris. He established the Carmelites in France in 1603 with the support of Mme Acarie and Michel de Marillac, Keeper of the Seals. In 1611 he founded the Congregation of the Oratory, of which he was the first Superior. King Louis XIII entrusted him with the honorable mission of conducting to England Henriette of France, daughter of Henry IV, for her marriage (May 11, 1625) to the Prince of Wales, the future Charles I. Bérulle had great influence on the clergy and gathered around himself the most virtuous and eminent priests of Paris. As soon as Vincent arrived in the city, he sought the assistance and advice of Bérulle. Abelly claimed that the saint lived “about two years” under Bérulle’s roof (*op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. VI, p. 24), but more likely it was four or five months at the most. Bérulle’s intervention is evident in Vincent’s acceptance of the parish of Clichy, his entrance as tutor into the de Gondi family, his withdrawal to Châtillon-les-Dombes, and his return to the de Gondi household. We would like to be able to state that their relationship always remained the same. However, Bérulle did not approve of the nascent Congregation of the Mission and even tried to prevent its approval by Rome, as one of his letters to Pierre Bertin indicated. In 1628, referring to the new Congregation, he wrote, “The plans that you tell me of those who are soliciting the business of the missions by various and, in my opinion, devious ways, should make it suspect and oblige us to put aside the reserve and simplicity with which I consider the affairs of God should be conducted.” (Cf. Archives of the Mission, according to

say that it was good to keep oneself humble, that the lowliest states were the surest ones, that there was a certain malignancy in lofty, exalted conditions, that this was the reason the saints had always shunned high offices, and that, in order to convince us by His own word and example, Our Lord had said, speaking of himself, that He had come into the world to serve and not to be served.”²

43. - HUMAN RESPECT

One day, when one of his men had accused himself before the others of having acted through human respect, Vincent de Paul, filled with love of God, said that “it would be better to be thrown, with our hands and feet bound, on burning coals rather than to do something to please others.” Then, after starting to list, on the one hand, some of the divine perfections, and, on the other, some of the faults, imperfections, and failings of creatures in order to show the injustice and folly of those who neglect to perform their actions for God, losing their time and trouble by having only base, human views in what they do, he added these words worthy of note, “Let’s always honor the perfections of God; let’s take as the aim of whatever we have to do those that are most contrary to our imperfections, such as His gentleness and mildness, directly opposed to our anger; His knowledge, so contrary to our blindness; His infinite grandeur and majesty, so highly elevated above our lowliness and baseness; His infinite goodness, always in contrast to our malice. Let’s strive to do all our actions to honor and glorify this perfection of God, which is directly contrary to our faults.”

He added that this effort was like the soul of our works, greatly increasing their value and worth. He also recalled, speaking of this, the clothing Princes and great Lords wore on the days of their triumphs

Arch. Nat., M 216, second packet, folio of Fr. Bertin, p. 26, in which this excerpt is no longer found.) At the time, Bérulle had been a Cardinal for a year. He died on October 2, 1629, and his life was written by Fr. Cloyseault. Fr. Ingold published this manuscript in 1880.

²Cf. Mt 20:28. (NAB)

Conference 43. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. IV, p. 31, excerpt.

and splendor; for, he said, “clothing is usually prized not so much for the fabric of which it’s made as for the gold trimming and embroidered adornments, pearls, and precious stones with which it’s embellished. In like manner, we mustn’t be content with doing good works, but must enrich and increase their value by the merit of a very noble and holy intention, doing them only to please and glorify God.”

43a. - PURITY OF INTENTION

“God considers not so much our external actions as the degree of love and purity of intention with which we do them. Insignificant actions done to please God are not so subject to vainglory as other, more brilliant ones, which quite often vanish into thin air. In a word, if we want to please God in great actions, we must accustom ourselves to please him in humble ones.”

44. - GENTLENESS

“Sometimes we see people who seem to be endowed with great gentleness, which, however, is very often only a result of their natural moderation. They don’t, however, have Christian gentleness, whose characteristic is to repress and stifle the sallies of the contrary vice. We aren’t chaste because we don’t experience immodest impulses but rather because we resist them when we do have them. Here in this house we have an example of true gentleness; I’m saying this because the person isn’t present, and all of you can attest to his dry, arid temperament. I’m referring to M. . . . ; and you can easily determine whether there are any two persons alive who are as uncouth and forbidding as we are, and yet, we see this man overcome himself to the point that we can truly say that he’s no longer what he used to be. What has caused that? It’s the virtue of gentleness, at

Conference 43a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. IV, pp. 30-31, excerpt.

Conference 44. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, p. 178, excerpt.

which he's working, whereas I, wretch that I am, remain dry as a bramble branch. I beg you, Messieurs, not to stop at the bad examples I give you; rather—to borrow the words of the holy Apostle—I urge you to walk worthily and with all gentleness and graciousness in the state to which you have been called by God.”¹

45. - GENTLENESS

“There are no people more constant and steadfast in doing good than those who are gentle and good-natured, just as, on the contrary, those who allow themselves to give in to anger and the passions of the irascible appetite are usually very fickle because they act only on impulse and fits of anger. They're like mountain streams, strong and impetuous only when they overflow, but which dry up as soon as their waters are drained; whereas rivers, which represent good-natured people, flow quietly, tranquilly, and never dry up.”

46. - GENTLENESS IN CONTROVERSIES

“When you debate someone, the arguments you use on that occasion make the person see clearly that you want to come out on top; that's why he's prepared to resist rather than to acknowledge the truth. The result is that, instead of helping him to open his mind more by this debate, you ordinarily close the door of his heart. On the contrary, gentleness and affability open it. We have a beautiful example of that in blessed Francis de Sales, who, although he was very knowledgeable in controversies, nevertheless converted heretics more by his gentleness than by his doctrine. On this point, Cardinal du Perron¹ used to say that he really worked hard to convince heretics,

¹Cf. Eph 4:1-2. (NAB)

Conference 45. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, p. 180, excerpt.

Conference 46. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, p. 181, excerpt.

¹Jacques Cardinal du Perron (1556-1618), Bishop of Angoulême, who was a member of the Council of Regency after the death of Henry IV (1610).

but the Bishop of Geneva was the one who converted them. Remember carefully, Messieurs, the words of Saint Paul to that great missionary Saint Timothy, *Servum Domini non oportet litigare*:² a servant of Jesus Christ was not to get involved in arguments or debates; and I can certainly tell you that I've never seen or known any heretic who was converted by the strength of the debate or the subtlety of the arguments but rather by gentleness, so true it is that this virtue has the power to win people over to God."

47. - GENTLENESS

(1) To foresee the occasions when we might fail in gentleness, to think about what topics might provoke angry reactions, and form mentally in advance the acts of gentleness we intend to practice on all occasions.

(2) To detest the vice of anger because it displeases God, without, however, becoming angry or growing bitter at seeing ourselves subject to it, especially since we must hate this vice and love the contrary virtue, not because the former displeases us and we find the latter pleasing, but only for love of God, whom this virtue pleases and this vice displeases. By so doing, the sorrow we will conceive of the faults we have committed against this virtue will be sweet and tranquil.

(3) When we feel moved to anger, to stop what we are doing and even what we are saying, and, above all, to make no decisions until this passion has calmed down because actions done while we are agitated like that are not completely guided by reason, which is disturbed and clouded by passion and, consequently, are never perfect.

(4) During this emotional state, to strive to control ourselves to the point of not letting anything show on our face. There is nothing in this contrary to simplicity because we do it, not to appear other than we are, but through a sincere desire that the virtue of gentleness, which is in the superior part of the soul, might pass on to our face, our

²*The Servant of the Lord ought not to quarrel.* Cf. 2 Tm 2:23-24. (NAB)

Conference 47. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, p. 179, summary.

tongue, and our external actions in order to please God and the neighbor for love of God.

(5) Above all, to hold our tongue while our heart is agitated, and, despite all the ferment of the anger and all the sallies of zeal imaginable, to say only gentle, pleasant words in order to win people over to God. “Sometimes all it takes is a gentle word to convert a hardened person; a harsh word, on the contrary, is capable of upsetting a soul and causing in it a bitterness that could be very harmful to it.” The saint declared many times that he had used harsh words only three times in his life to reprove and correct others, thinking he had good reason to act that way, and he always wished afterward that he hadn’t because things turned out very badly; on the contrary, he always got what he wanted through gentleness.

47a. - PATIENCE

“The state of pain and affliction is not a bad state; God puts us in it to make us practice the virtue of patience and to teach us compassion toward others. He himself willed to experience this state in order that we might have a high priest who could share our sufferings and encourage us by His example to practice this virtue.

“One of the surest signs that God has great plans for someone is when He sends him distress upon distress and trouble upon trouble. The real time to recognize the spiritual mettle of a soul is the time of temptation and tribulation because the way we are during these trials is the way we usually are afterward. We can acquire greater merit in a single day of temptation than in many other peaceful ones.”

47b. - FRANCIS DE SALES, AN EXAMPLE OF GENTLENESS

On this topic (gentleness) he gave the example of blessed Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, who, he said, was the most gentle, friendly man he ever knew. The first time he saw him, he recognized in the way he greeted him, in the serenity of his expression, and in his manner of conversing and speaking a very special image of the gentleness of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which won over his heart.

48. - AFFABILITY

“We have all the more need of affability because we’re more obliged by our vocation to converse often among ourselves and with the neighbor, and this conversation is more difficult, either among ourselves because we’re from different parts of the country or have very different personalities and moods, or with the neighbor, with whom we often have a great deal to bear. It’s the virtue of affability that does away with these difficulties and which, since it’s like the soul of a good conversation, makes the conversation not only helpful but pleasant as well. It causes us to act with decorum in conversation and to be deferential to one another; and, just as charity unites us as members of one same body, affability perfects this union.”

49. - AFFABILITY

Vincent de Paul recommended particularly to his men the practice of affability toward poor country persons. “Otherwise, they’re put off and don’t dare approach us, thinking that we’re too harsh or are gentlemen too great for them. But, when we treat them affably

Conference 47b. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, p. 180, excerpt.

Conference 48. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, p. 180, excerpt.

Conference 49. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, p. 181, excerpt.

and cordially, they think differently about us and are better disposed to take advantage of the benefit we're trying to offer them. Now, since God has destined us to serve them, we have to do it in the way most beneficial to them, and, consequently, treat them with great affability, taking this advice of the Wise Man as if it were addressed to each one of us in particular: *Congregationi pauperum affabilem te facito*: make yourselves affable to the assembly of the poor.”¹

50. - THE SPIRIT OF GRACIOUS CONDESCENSION

“Our obedience must not be limited simply to those who have the right to give us orders, but must go beyond that; for we'll be very careful not to fail in the obedience that is of obligation if, as Saint Peter recommends, we submit to every human creature for love of God.¹ So, let's do that and consider everyone else as superior to us, putting ourselves beneath them—even lower than the lowliest ones—and let's anticipate them by deference, condescension, and all sorts of services. What a good thing it would be if God were pleased to ground us firmly in this practice!”

51. - THE SPIRIT OF GRACIOUS CONDESCENSION

“In a Community, all those who compose it and are its members must be gracious with one another. In line with that, the learned must condescend to the weakness of the unlearned and to things in which there is no error or sin; the wise and prudent must condescend to the humble and simple; *non alta sapientes, sed humilibus consentientes*.¹ And by this same gracious condescension we must not only approve the opinions of others in good and indifferent things, but

¹Cf. Sir 4:7. (NAB)

Conference 50. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIV, p. 233, excerpt.

¹Cf. 1 Pt 2:13. (NAB)

Conference 51. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIV, p. 233, excerpt.

¹*Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly.* Cf. Rom 12:16. (NAB)

even prefer them to our own, believing that others have lights and natural or supernatural qualities greater and more excellent than we have. We must, however, be very careful not to condescend in bad things because that wouldn't be a virtue but a serious fault, proceeding from either a free spirit or some laxity and faintheartedness."

52. - MORTIFICATION

"Let's hold fast against our nature; for, if we give it an inch, it will take a mile. And we can rest assured that the measure of our progress in the spiritual life must be taken from the progress we're making in the virtue of mortification, which is particularly necessary for those who have to work for the salvation of souls; for it's useless for us to preach penance to others, if we don't practice it ourselves and if it isn't obvious in our actions and behavior."

53. - MORTIFICATION

"Woe betide the person who seeks his own satisfactions! Woe betide the person who flees from crosses, for he'll find such heavy ones that they'll overwhelm him! The man who makes little account of external mortifications, saying that interior ones are much more perfect, makes it rather clear that he isn't mortified at all, either interiorly or exteriorly."

54. - SENSUALITY

"Sensuality is found everywhere, and not only in the pursuit of worldly esteem, wealth, and pleasures, but also in devotions, in the

Conference 52. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIX, p. 297, excerpt.

Conference 53. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XXIV, sect. I, p. 342, excerpt.

Conference 54. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIX, p. 288, excerpt.

holiest actions, in books, and in pictures; in a word, it worms its way into everything. O my Savior, grant us the grace of divesting ourselves of self; please help us to disregard ourselves in order to love You more perfectly, You who are the source of all virtue and perfection and the mortal enemy of sensuality. Give us this spirit of mortification and the grace always to resist self-love, which is the root of all our sensuality.”

55. - THE GOOD USE OF ILLNESS

“It must be admitted that the state of sickness is an unfortunate state and is almost unbearable to nature; nevertheless, it’s one of the most powerful means God uses to remind us of our duty, to detach us from attraction to sin, and to fill us with His gifts and graces. O Savior, You who have suffered so much, who died to redeem us and to show us how much this painful state could glorify God and serve for our sanctification, please grant that we may understand the great benefit and treasure hidden in this state of illness. It’s through sickness, Messieurs, that souls are cleansed of impurities and that those who lack virtue have an efficacious means of acquiring it. No more suitable state can be found in which to practice it; it’s in sickness that faith is exercised in a marvelous way; hope shines brightly in it; resignation, love of God, and ample opportunities for the practice of all the virtues are found in it. In it we can know what each man bears and what he is; it’s the gauge by which you can probe and discover with the greatest assurance the virtue of each and every person—whether he has a lot, a little, or none at all.

“We never see better what a man is than when he is in the infirmary. It’s the surest proof we have for recognizing the most virtuous men and those who are less so. This helps us to see how important it is for us to be firmly grounded in the proper way to behave during illness. Oh! If we only knew how to act like a good ser-

vant of God who, when he was sick in bed, made of this a throne of merit and glory! He surrounded himself with the holy Mysteries of our religion. On the baldachin of the bed, he placed a picture of the Most Holy Trinity; at the bedside, a picture of the Incarnation; on one side, the Circumcision; on the other, the Blessed Sacrament; at the foot of the bed the Crucifixion. Thus, no matter to which side he turned, to the right or to the left, whether he looked up or down, he was always surrounded by these divine Mysteries and, as it were, enveloped and filled with God.¹ What a beautiful inspiration, Messieurs, what a beautiful inspiration! If God were to grant us this grace, how happy we'd be!

"We have good reason to praise God that, by His goodness and mercy, there are sick and infirm men in the Company who make of their inactivity and sufferings a theater of patience, in which they show forth all the virtues in their brilliance. We must thank God for having given us such persons. I've already said many times, and can't refrain from saying it again, that we must believe that its sick members are the blessing of the Company.

"Let's reflect that infirmities and sufferings come from God. Death, life, health, sickness—all these come by order of His Providence and, no matter how they come, they're always for our benefit and salvation. Yet, some men are very often quite impatient with their ailments, and that's a serious fault. Others persuade themselves that they need a change, that they should go to this place or that, to this house, that province, or their native region, under the pretext that the air is better there. Why do they do that? They're men

¹Dodin tells us (cf. *Entretiens spirituels*, p. 942, n. 1) that this was a pious gentleman known as Bro. Antoine, whom Saint Vincent mentioned in a conference to the Daughters of Charity (cf. IX, 332, n. 6). Antoine Flandin-Maillet was born in 1590 in Saint-Geoire (Isère) and died in Montreuil (Ain) on February 16, 1629. The conversions attributed to his prayers, the cures obtained by his laying on of hands, his battles with demons, his relationships with angels, and his enlightened advice wrapped him in a mantle of holiness; his prestige was acknowledged not only by poor and humble persons but also by Princes and the great and powerful. In 1628, the Queen had him brought to Paris so she could converse with this simple, illiterate man, whose sanctity everyone proclaimed. It was at that time that Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, and Fr. Portail had the happiness of meeting him. Bro. Antoine's portrait hung in one of the rooms of Saint-Lazare. He was not a member of the Congregation of the Mission and there is no indication that he belonged to any religious Community.

attached to themselves, who act like little girls; they're persons who are unwilling to put up with anything, as if bodily infirmities were evils to be avoided. To shun the state in which God is pleased to place us is to run away from our own happiness. Yes, suffering is a state of happiness that sanctifies souls."²

56. - ZEAL

"Whoever says *Missioner*, says a man called by God to save souls; for our aim is to work at their salvation, in imitation of Our Lord, who is the only true Redeemer and who fulfilled perfectly this amiable name of Jesus, that is, *Savior*. He came from heaven to earth to carry out this office; He made it the reason for His life and death; and He constantly exercises this role of Savior by sharing with us the merits of the blood He has shed.

"While He was living on earth, He directed all His thoughts to our salvation, and He still has the same sentiments because that's where He finds His Father's Will. He came, and He still comes to us for that purpose. By His example, He taught us all the virtues proper to the function of Savior. Let's give ourselves to Him, then, so that He'll continue to exercise this same function in and through us."

57. - ZEAL

"God is opening up for us a beautiful field of action in Madagascar, in the Hebrides, and elsewhere. Let's pray that God will fill our hearts with the burning desire to serve Him; let's give ourselves to Him to do with us whatever He pleases. Saint Vincent Ferrer was encouraged by the thought that priests were to come who, by their fervent zeal, would set the whole earth afire. If we're unworthy of

²Abelly adds here some material taken from the Conference of June 28, 1658 (cf. **XII**, Conf. 184).

Conference 56. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VIII, sect. II, p. 89, excerpt.

Conference 57. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. X, p. 101, excerpt.

having God grant us the grace of being those priests, let's beg Him to grant us at least the favor of making us their images and precursors; but, whatever the case, let's hold for certain that we won't be true Christians until we're ready to lose everything and even to give our lives for the love and glory of Jesus Christ. Let's resolve, with the holy Apostle, to choose the torments of death itself rather than to be separated from the charity of this Divine Savior.”¹

57a. - GREATNESS OF THE BARBARY MISSION

“This work was considered so great and holy that it gave rise to the institution of some holy Orders in God's Church, and those Orders have always been highly respected, especially since they were instituted for the slaves, like the religious of the Redemption of Captives,¹ who go from time to time to ransom some slaves and then return home. Among the vows they take, one of them is to devote themselves to the ransom of Christian slaves. Isn't that excellent and holy, my dear confreres? Nevertheless, I think there's something more in those who go to Barbary not only to help in the ransom of those poor Christians, but, in addition, remain there to work full time at this charitable redemption, assisting those poor slaves corporally and spiritually at all hours, as well as being constantly attuned to all their needs; in a word, always there, ready to lend them a hand and to help and console them in all sorts of ways in their greatest afflictions and sufferings. O my dear confreres, do you really think about the importance of this work? Does anything resemble more what Our Lord did when He came down to earth to redeem us from the captivity of sin and to instruct us by His words and example? That's the example all Missioners must follow; for

¹Cf. Rom. 8:35. (NAB)

Conference 57a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, pp. 142-43, excerpt.

¹The Order of Mercy (Order of Redemption), whose members are commonly known as Mercedarians, was founded for the redemption of captives by Saint Peter Nolasco in the thirteenth century.

this purpose they have to be ready to leave their native land, their comforts and their ease, like our good confreres in Tunis and Algiers, who have given themselves totally to the service of God and the neighbor in those barbarian, infidel lands.”

57b. - PRAISE FOR AID TO THE PROVINCES DEVASTATED BY WAR

“Admittedly, we can think only with admiration of those generous alms God inspired people to make, and of the quantity of clothes, sheets, blankets, shirts, shoes, etc., that have been provided for all sorts of persons—men, women, children, and even priests—along with the large number of albs, chasubles, missals, ciboria, chalices, and other sacred vessels sent for the churches. Those churches were plundered to the point that, without this aid, the celebration of the Holy Mysteries and the practices of the Christian religion would have been banished from them, and those sacred places would have been used only for profane things. It was truly an edifying spectacle to see the homes of the Ladies of Charity of Paris filled with all sorts of clothing and become like warehouses and the stores of wholesale merchants. Those Ladies will doubtless have in heaven the crown of priests because of the zeal and charity they had in clothing Jesus Christ on His altars, in his priests, and in His poor members.”

**57c. - RECOMMENDATIONS TO SOME MISSIONERS
LEAVING FOR DISTANT COUNTRIES**

“Go, Messieurs, in the name of Our Lord! It’s He who is sending you; it’s for His service and glory that you’re undertaking this journey and mission; He will also be the one who will guide, assist, and protect you. We hope for this from His infinite goodness; always remain in loyal dependence on His faithful guidance. Have recourse to

Conference 57b. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. XI, pp. 407-08, excerpt.

Conference 57c. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. III, p. 12, excerpt.

Him everywhere and on all occasions; throw yourselves into His arms, as one you must recognize as your very good Father, with the firm trust that He will assist you and bless your work.”

57d. - PRAISE FOR MISSIONARY WORK

“Our Lord recommends to us by those words (‘Seek first the kingdom of God’)¹ that we have God reign within us and then co-operate with Him in extending His kingdom and making it increase in the conquest of souls. Isn’t it a great honor for us to be called to carry out such a great and important plan? Isn’t that to act like the angels, who work constantly and solely for the extension of the kingdom of God? Is there any state more desirable than ours, which we must not live in or act except to spread and increase the kingdom of God? What reason will we not have, brothers, to respond worthily to such a holy, sanctifying vocation?”

57e. - CHARITY FOR THE FOUNDLINGS

“Isn’t it the duty of fathers to provide for the needs of their children and, since God has put us in the place of those who begot them, to set about saving their lives and seeing that they’re brought up and instructed in things necessary for their salvation; let’s be very careful not to grow lax in an undertaking so pleasing to Him. For, if we should neglect the care of seeing that they’re fed and brought up, after their unnatural mothers have exposed and abandoned them, what will become of them? Could we consent to seeing all of them die, as happened formerly in this great city of Paris?”

Conference 57d. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. IV, p. 32, excerpt.

¹Cf. Mt 6:33. (NAB)

Conference 57e. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, sect. II, p. 127, excerpt.

58. - FORTITUDE IN PERSECUTION

After telling his Community the story of some persecution that the Barbary Missioners had undergone, M. Vincent added, “Who knows whether God didn’t send this trial to test our fidelity? Do merchants stop going to sea because of the dangers they face, and soldiers to war because of the wounds—and even death—they may be risking? And should we stop carrying out our duty of helping and saving souls because of the difficulties and persecutions to be encountered in it?”

59. - CHARITY

“Each thing produces, as it were, a species and image of itself, as we see in a mirror, which represents objects just as they are: an ugly face appears ugly, and a handsome one looks handsome. In the same way, good or bad qualities are spread exteriorly, especially charity, which, in itself, is contagious and produces charity. A heart truly on fire and animated with this virtue makes its ardor felt; and everything in a charitable man breathes and preaches charity.”

60. - CHARITY

In one of his talks to his Community, M. Vincent said that Missioners would be very happy if they became poor by practicing charity toward others, but that they had no fear of becoming so by this means, unless they mistrusted Our Lord’s goodness and the truth of His word.

“If, nevertheless, God allowed them to be reduced to the necessity of going to serve as priests in the villages to earn their living, or even if some of them were obliged to go to beg for their bread or to sleep

Conference 58. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. X, p. 101, excerpt.

Conference 59. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, p. 109, excerpt.

Conference 60. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, p. 108, excerpt.

under some bush, in ragged clothing and chilled to the bone, and someone should ask one of them, ‘Poor Priest of the Mission, what has reduced you to these straits?’ what a happiness, Messieurs, to be able to reply, ‘It’s charity!’ How that poor priest would be esteemed before God and the angels!”

60a. - FRATERNAL CHARITY

Fraternal charity is one of the signs of their predestination, since by it a person is recognized as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. One day, when he was celebrating Mass on the feast of Saint John the Evangelist, using the words of this Apostle, *Filioli diligite alterutrum!*¹ to exhort his men to love one another, he said, “The Congregation of the Mission will last as long as charity reigns in it.”

He also said to them, “Charity is the soul of virtues and the paradise of Communities. The Saint-Lazare house will be a paradise if charity is found in it; paradise is nothing other than love, union, and charity; the principal happiness of eternal life consists in loving; in heaven, the blessed are constantly devoted to beatific love and, in a word, nothing is more desirable than to live with those whom we love and who love us.

“Christian love,” he continued, “formed in hearts by charity, is not only above love of inclination and the love produced by sensory appetites, which is ordinarily more harmful than helpful, but even higher than rational love. This Christian love is one by which we love one another in God, in accordance with God, and for God; it’s a love that causes us to love one another for the same purpose for which God loves us, which is to make saints of us in this world and blessed in the next; and, for that purpose, this love causes us to look at God and not anything else but God in every person we love.

“The person who tried to live in a Community without mutual support and charity,” he added, “would be subject to the ups and

Conference 60a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, sect. VI, pp. 160-61, excerpt.

¹My little children, love one another. Cf. Jn 13:35. (NAB)

downs of temperaments and actions that clashed with his own, like a ship without an anchor and rudder, that would drift into the midst of rocks, at the mercy of wind and waves buffeting it from all sides and causing it to smash to pieces.”

Lastly he added, “Missioners must not only love one another with a holy, interior affection, and make this apparent simply by their words, but they must witness by works and good results, willingly helping one another in their ministries in this spirit and always being ready to go to the aid of their confreres.”

He desired ardently that God might infuse this charity into the hearts of all the members of his Congregation, especially since, he said, “By this mutual support the strong will sustain the weak, and the work of God will be accomplished.”

60b. - THE NEED TO PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

“We’re going to pray for the family of a certain person who has suffered a great loss; we must empathize with our brother and make this a duty toward one another.”

Sometimes, depending on the need, he would add, “I ask the priests who don’t have any special obligations to offer Mass for the members of this suffering family. I, first of all, am willingly offering to God for them the Holy Mass I’m about to celebrate, and I ask our Brothers to receive Holy Communion for this same intention.”

60c. - MAKING ALLOWANCE FOR THE FAILINGS OF OTHERS

“We mustn’t be surprised to see others commit faults because, just as it’s characteristic of brambles and thistles to be prickly, it’s characteristic of the corrupt nature of man to fail, since he is con-

Conference 60b. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, sect. VI, p. 168, excerpt.

Conference 60c. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, sect. I, p. 184, excerpt.

ceived and is born in sin. Even the just man, according to the thinking of Solomon, falls seven times, that is, several times, a day.¹

“The spirit of man,” he added, “has its own kinds of disorders and illnesses, just as the body does, and, instead of being bothered and discouraged by this, he must, by recognizing his wretched state, humble himself for it and say to God, like David after his sin, ‘*Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me, ut discam justificationes tuas*’: It is good for me that you have humbled me, so that I may learn your justifications.”² We must bear with ourselves in our weaknesses and imperfections, but still strive to rise above them.

“If it’s forbidden to judge others rashly,” he continued, “it’s even less lawful to talk about them, since it’s the distinctive feature of charity, as the holy Apostle states, to cover a multitude of sins;³ and this saying of the Wise Man, *Audisti verbum adversus proximum tuum? Commoriatur in te!* Have you heard anything bad about your neighbor? Stifle it and let it die within you!”⁴

61. - THE SPIRIT OF COMPASSION

“Since the Son of God was unable to have feelings of compassion in the state of His glory, which He possesses from all eternity in heaven, He willed to become man and to be our High Priest in order to share our sufferings. To reign with Him in heaven, we must, like Him, commiserate with His members on earth. Missioners, above all other priests, must be filled with this spirit of compassion, since they are obliged by their state and vocation to serve the most wretched, the most abandoned, and those most weighed down by corporal and spiritual sufferings. First of all, they must be touched to the quick and afflicted in their own hearts by the sufferings of their neighbor.

¹For the just man falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble to ruin. Cf. Prov 24:16. (NAB)

²Cf. Ps 119:71. (NAB)

³Cf. 1 Pt 4:8. (NAB)

⁴Cf. Sir 19:9. (NAB)

Conference 61. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, sect. II, p. 123, excerpt.

Second, this suffering and compassion must be apparent in their exterior and in their expression, after the example of Our Lord, who wept over the city of Jerusalem because of the disasters with which it was threatened. Third, they must use compassionate words, which make the neighbor see how they share his feelings, interests, and sufferings. Lastly, they must do their utmost to rescue and assist him in his needs and sufferings, and try to free him from them in whole or in part because, as far as possible, the hand must conform to the heart.”

62. - OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL AUTHORITY

“Brothers, in imitation [of the first Christians], we must always render faithful, simple obedience to Kings, and never murmur or complain about them for any reason whatsoever. Even should there be question of losing our possessions and our lives, let’s sacrifice them in this spirit of obedience rather than go against their wills, if God’s Will is not opposed to that; for Kings represent to us the sovereign power of God on earth.”

62a. - INDIFFERENCE

“But, as for the first state (the state in which God places a person), which comes from the Will of God, we must accept it, whatever it may be, and resign ourselves to the good pleasure of God to endure all that pleases Him, for as much and as long a time as He wishes. This, my dear confreres, is the great lesson of the Son of God, and those who are docile to it and implant it deeply in their hearts are the top class of the school of this Divine Master. As for myself, I know nothing more holy or more perfect than this resignation, when it leads to a total stripping of self and true indifference for all sorts of states, in whatever manner we may be placed in them, except sin. So

Conference 62. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIV, p. 232, excerpt.

Conference 62a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. V, sect. II, p. 42, excerpt.

then, let's be steadfast in that and ask God to grant us the grace of remaining constantly in this indifference."

63. - THE VIRTUE OF POVERTY

"You must realize, Messieurs, that this virtue of poverty is the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission; this tongue that's speaking to you has never, by the grace of God, asked for anything that the Company now possesses; and even should there be question of taking one step or saying a single word to have this same Company established in the provinces and large towns, and increased in number and important ministries, I'd be unwilling to utter it, and I hope that Our Lord would grant me the grace not to say it. This is my disposition and also to allow God's Providence to act."

64. - ATTACHMENT TO TEMPORAL GOODS

"My dear confreres, woe-woe, yes, woe—to the Missioner who wants to be attached to the perishable goods of this life! He'll be snagged by them, he'll remain pricked by those thorns and caught in those bonds; and if this misfortune befalls the Company, what would people say about it after that, and how would we live in it? 'We have so many thousand livres in income,' he'd say, 'we should take it easy. Why run around to the villages? Why work so hard? Let's leave the poor country people alone; let their Pastors look after them, if they want; let's lead a soft life and not go to so much trouble.' That's how laziness will follow the spirit of greed; he'll no longer be concerned with anything but to preserve and increase his temporal goods and to seek his own satisfactions; and then we can say good-bye to all the works of the Mission and to the Mission itself, for it will no longer exist. All we have to do is read the history books and we'll find

Conference 63. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XVIII, p. 275, excerpt

Conference 64. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XVIII, p. 275, excerpt.

countless examples that will make us see that wealth and the abundance of worldly goods have caused the loss not only of many of the clergy but also of entire Communities and religious Orders because they weren't faithful to their primitive spirit of poverty."

64a. - CONVERSATION WITH A PRIEST REGARDING POVERTY

One day, when one of his priests was telling him how poor his house was, he asked him, "What do you do, Monsieur, when you lack something that's necessary for the Community? Do you turn to God?"

"Yes, sometimes," replied the priest.

"*Hé, bien!*" he responded, "That's what poverty does; it makes us think of God and to raise our hearts to Him, whereas, if we were comfortable, maybe we'd forget God. That's why I'm overjoyed that voluntary, real poverty is practiced in all our houses. There's a hidden grace in that poverty of which we're unaware."

"But," said the priest, "you provide for poor people and you ignore your own men?"

"I pray that God will forgive you for those words," said M. Vincent. "I see clearly that you said them quite simply, but know that we'll never be richer than when we're like Jesus Christ."

65. - OBSERVANCE OF RULE

First point: Motives for observing the Regulations of the Mission:

It's very important to observe our regulations carefully because:

(1) It's the Will of God, who dictated them himself to the Superior.

Conference 64a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XVIII, p. 276.

Conference 65. - Manuscript of Conferences, summary.

(2) It's our whole concern; it's all we have to do; it's the goal we have to set for ourselves, for we're called to the Mission only to live in it conformably to the Rules; it's their observance, and not the habit, that makes us Missioners.

(3) It's the means of preserving us in our vocation, and God will never allow a man, imperfect though he may be, to lose his vocation if he's faithful to his duty; whereas, on the contrary, the broad way of losing his vocation is negligence of the Rules.

(4) We're the first members and must give the example to those who will come after; and if, in the beginning, we were to be negligent in observing our Rules, it's greatly to be feared that the Company might gradually fall into ruin.

(5) It's impossible to acquire the spirit of the Mission without the observance of the Rules in which it is contained and enshrined.

(6) It's the path by which we can attain holiness and become saints, and by which God wants to lead us to salvation. There was a Pope who wanted no other indications of the sanctity of a religious in order to canonize him than to be assured that he had been an exact observer of his Rules.¹

(7) Lastly, one of the greatest consolations we can have at the hour of death will be to have observed our regulations well; and if we've been faithful to them, we can hope that God will say to us at that time, *Euge, serve bone et fidelis, intra in gaudium Domini tui; quia in modico fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam.*²

Second point: In what perfect observance of the Rules consists:

The perfect observance of the Rules consists in:

(1) Observing all of them and not neglecting any of them, no matter how small, since in all of them we find God's Will, which is our most powerful motive.

(2) Being punctual, leaving a letter unfinished and leaving as soon as the bell sounds.

¹Pope Innocent VIII (1484-92). In previous conferences in vols. IX and X, this statement is attributed erroneously to Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605).

²*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord; because you were faithful in small things, I will place you over greater ones.* Cf. Mt 25:21. (NAB)

(3) Observing them with the right spirit, making our intention for the greater glory of God and for love of Him.

(4) Observing them attentively and judiciously.

(5) Finishing matters of Rule that were begun, not leaving them half done, unless obedience calls us elsewhere or some important act of charity obliges us to do so.

(6) Doing them gaily and cheerfully; *hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus*.³

(7) Observing them blindly, without finding fault with any of them.

(8) Observing them forever, that is, for our whole life, and everywhere, that is, on mission and while traveling, as well as in the house.

Third point: The means of being well grounded in the practice of the Rules:

(1) To have a high regard for the Rules and to be persuaded that God's Will is in them for us personally, who are called to the Mission.

(2) To read them frequently and examine ourselves often on the ones in which we usually fail, asking the Superior for a penance when we fail in the most important ones, and even in the smallest ones, when there is great negligence.

(3) To love our vocation dearly, for the man who is really attached to it will be a great observer of the Rules, which alone make us Missioners.

(4) To be attentive to practicing them in the absence, as well as in the presence, of Superiors; for, ordinarily, if we let ourselves slip, it's rather when Superiors are not keeping an eye on us, so great is our weakness.

(5) Not to be concerned about what others are doing, because they sometimes take liberties, but be attentive to what we ourselves should be doing.

(6) To make our particular examen from time to time on the above and take firm resolutions on it in our meditations.

³For God loves a cheerful giver. Cf. 2 Cor 9:7. (NAB)

(7) To thank God fervently when we see that we're observing them, and ask Him often to grant us this grace of being able to keep them faithfully.

(8) To be faithful to keeping the practices, which are like the defensive walls of the Rules.

(9) To model ourselves on those who keep the Rules exactly, in order to imitate them.

(10) One means for reflection is to consider what would happen to a Congregation in which the Rule would not be kept. What confusion, etc.!

66. - REGULARITY

Speaking of the priests of his Congregation, M. Vincent said one day that "those who were not exact to this, particularly to rising in the morning and making their meditation in the place and at the time the others do it, even though they might otherwise be very talented and gifted for leadership, were not, however, suitable to be local Superiors or Seminary Directors." And he added that "when there is question of appointing Superiors, we must be very careful that the persons chosen for these offices are regular and exemplary; otherwise they'd be lacking one of the principal qualities required in those responsible for guiding others."

66a. - DISPOSITIONS TO BE BROUGHT TO MEDITATION

Regarding dispositions, he said that he knew of none better than humility, acknowledgment of one's nothingness before God, mortification of the passions and unruly natural impulses, interior recollection, uprightness, simplicity of heart, attention to the presence of

Conference 66. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XXIV, sect. I, p. 350, excerpt.

Conference 66a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VII, p. 55, excerpt.

God, total dependence on His Will, and frequent aspirations with regard to His goodness.

67. - MEDITATION

“Give me a man of prayer, and he’ll be able to do anything; he can say with the holy Apostle, ‘I can do all things in Him who sustains and comforts me.’¹ The Congregation of the Mission will survive as long as it’s faithful to the practice of meditation because meditation is like an impregnable rampart, which will protect the Missioners against all sorts of attacks; it’s a mystical arsenal, or is like the Tower of David, which will supply them with all sorts of weapons, not only to defend themselves but also to attack and rout all the enemies of God’s glory and the salvation of souls.”

68. - MEDITATION

“Meditation is a sermon we preach to ourselves to convince us of the need we have to turn to God and to cooperate with His grace in order to uproot vices from our soul and implant virtues in it. In meditation, we have to strive especially to combat the passion or evil inclination that is devouring us and try always to mortify it because, when we succeed in that, the rest easily follows.”

M. Vincent also recommended being steadfast in this battle; going gently in our manner of proceeding; not racking our brains by making too great an effort and trying to be too subtle in our arguments; elevating our mind to God and listening to Him because a single one of His words can do more than a thousand reasons and all the speculations of our understanding.

Conference 67. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VII, p. 56, excerpt.

¹Cf. Phil 4:13. (NAB)

Conference 68. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VII, p. 58, excerpt.

He added that only what is inspired by God and comes from Him can do us any good; that we have to receive something from God in order to give it to the neighbor, after the example of Jesus Christ, who, speaking of himself, said that He taught others only what He had heard and learned from His Father.¹

69. - MEDITATION

“Notice the difference there is between the light of a fire and that of the sun: during the night our fire gives us light, and by means of its glow we see things, but only dimly, perceiving only the surface, and this glow goes no further. The sun, however, fills and vivifies everything by its light; it doesn’t reveal only the exterior of things but, by some secret power, penetrates within, causing them to act, even making them fruitful and fertile, according to the characteristic of their nature. Now, the thoughts and reflections that come from our understanding are only sparks that show just a little of the outside of objects and produce nothing more; but the lights of grace, which the Sun of Justice spreads in our souls, reveal and penetrate to the very depths and most intimate part of our heart, which they stir up and prompt to produce marvelous things. So then, we have to ask God to be himself the one to enlighten and inspire us with what is pleasing to Him. All those lofty, much sought-after considerations are not meditation; rather they are sometimes offshoots of pride; and it’s the same for those who dwell on them and take pleasure in them, like a preacher who shows off in his fine discourses and becomes self-satisfied in seeing his audience pleased with what he churns out for them. In that, it would be obvious that it’s not the Holy Spirit but rather the spirit of arrogance enlightening his understanding and producing all those beautiful thoughts, or, to put it better, it would be the devil exciting him and causing him to speak like that. It’s the same with meditation, when we seek beautiful reflections and entertain ex-

¹Cf. Lk 10:22. (NAB)

Conference 69. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VII, sect. I, p. 62, excerpt.

traordinary thoughts, especially if it's to display them outside when making Repetition of Prayer so that others will think highly of them. That's a type of blasphemy; in a certain sense it's idolizing one's own mind; for, when you're speaking with God in meditation and you meditate on how to satisfy your arrogance, using this sacred time to seek your own satisfaction and to take pleasure in this beautiful admiration of your thoughts, you're sacrificing to this idol of vanity.

“Let's be very careful about these follies, brothers! Let's acknowledge that we're filled with wretchedness; let's seek only what can make us more humble and lead us to the solid practice of virtue; let's always humble ourselves in meditation to the point of nothingness; in our Repetitions of Prayer, let's share our thoughts humbly; and if some come to mind that seem beautiful to us, let's be very mistrustful of ourselves and fear that the spirit of arrogance may be producing them, or that the devil is inspiring them. That's why we must always humble ourselves profoundly when these beautiful thoughts come to us, either when praying, preaching, or conversing with others. Alas! The Son of God could delight everyone by His divine eloquence, but He was unwilling to do so. On the contrary, in teaching the truths of His Gospel, He always used ordinary, familiar words and expressions; He always loved to be debased and despised rather than praised or esteemed. So, brothers, let's see how we can imitate Him; and for that purpose let's get rid of those proud thoughts in meditation and elsewhere; let's follow in everything the humble footsteps of Jesus Christ; let's use simple, everyday, familiar words; and if God allows it, let's be glad that people make little account of what we say, that they look down on us and make fun of us, and let's hold for certain that, without genuine, sincere humility, it's impossible for us to benefit either ourselves or others.”

70. - MEDITATION

“Just because you’ve been unfaithful in keeping your resolutions, don’t refrain from taking new ones in all your meditations; likewise, just as there may seem to be no benefit from the food we eat, we don’t stop eating because of that. Making good resolutions is one of the most important parts—even the most important part—of meditation; we have to dwell especially on that and not so much on reasoning and discourse. The principal result of meditation consists in being really determined—but making a truly firm resolution—to have well-founded resolutions, to be firmly convinced of them, to be well prepared to carry them out, and to foresee obstacles so we can overcome them. Still, that’s not all, for in the end our resolutions of themselves are only physical and moral actions; and, although we may do our best to form them in our heart and to be strengthened in them, we must, nevertheless, acknowledge that whatever is good in them, their practices, and their results—all that depends absolutely on God.

“What do you think is most often the cause of our failing in our resolutions? It’s that we depend too much on ourselves, we put our trust in our good desires, we rely on our own strength, and that’s the reason we don’t get any good results from them. That’s why, after taking a few resolutions at meditation, we have to pray fervently to God and ask earnestly for His grace, with great mistrust of ourselves, so that He may be pleased to share with us the graces needed to get some results from these resolutions. After that, even though we may still happen to fail in them not only once or twice but on several occasions and for a long time, and even if we haven’t put a single one of them into practice, we must never stop renewing them for that reason, or stop having recourse to the mercy of God and imploring the help of His grace.

“The faults of the past should truly humble us but not discourage us; regardless of any fault we may commit, we mustn’t lessen the confidence God wants us to have in Him but always renew our reso-

lution to start over and be careful not to relapse, with the help of His grace, which we have to ask of Him. Although physicians may see no effect from the remedies they give a patient, they don't fail, because of that, to continue to administer them and to repeat them until they see some hope of life. So then, if people continue to apply remedies for bodily ailments, although they may be long-term and very serious, and even though they see no improvement from them, for even greater reason should we do the same for the infirmities of our souls, in which, when it pleases God, grace may work very great marvels."

71. - MEDITATION

"You did well to divide up your meditation, Brother.¹ Nevertheless, when you take some Mystery as the subject of meditation, it's not necessary or advantageous to dwell on a particular virtue and to make your usual division on the subject of this virtue, but it's better to think about the story of the Mystery and to pay attention to all its details because there isn't a single one of them, no matter how insignificant and ordinary, in which great treasures may not be hidden, if we really know how to look for them. I was made aware of that recently in one of the conferences for those men who meet here.² The topic of their discussion was what should be done to spend the time of Lent in a holy manner. It was a very common topic that they were accustomed to discuss every year; yet, such good things were said that all those present were deeply touched by them, and I in particular. I can truly say that I've never been at a conference more devout than that one, nor one that made a greater impres-

Conference 71. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VII, sect. I, p. 65, Repetition of Prayer.

¹The Brother to whom Saint Vincent is speaking had just finished making Repetition of Prayer.

Saint Vincent refers to clerical students as *Brother*. The content usually helps us distinguish between a clerical student, a coadjutor Brother, and the generic confrere, all of them members of the Congregation.

²The priests of the Tuesday Conferences.

sion on those men; for, even though they had discussed that same subject many times, it seemed that it was no longer the same people who were talking; God had inspired them in meditation with a completely different language. You see, then, brothers, how God hides treasures in things that seem so ordinary, and in the slightest details of the truths and Mysteries of our religion. They're like tiny mustard seeds, that produce huge trees, when Our Lord is pleased to shed His blessings on them."

72. - MEDITATION

"Some men have beautiful thoughts and good sentiments, but they don't apply them to themselves and don't reflect sufficiently on their interior state; and yet, we've often recommended that, when God gives us some inspirations or good impulses in meditation, we must always make them serve our particular needs. We have to reflect on our own faults, confess and acknowledge them before God, and sometimes even accuse ourselves of them before the Company in order to humble ourselves and be disconcerted by them, and take a firm resolution to correct them. This is never done without some benefit.

"While the person was making Repetition of Prayer, I was wondering how it could happen that some men make such little progress in this holy exercise of meditation. There's good reason to fear that the cause of this failure may be that they don't practice enough mortification, and give too much free reign to their senses. Let them read what the most skillful masters of the spiritual life have left in writing concerning meditation, and they'll see that all of them have unanimously held that the practice of mortification is absolutely necessary to make meditation well, and that, in order to be well prepared for it, not only must we mortify our eyes, our tongue, our ears, and our other external senses, but also the faculties of our soul, our

understanding, memory, and will. By this means mortification will dispose us to make our meditation well and, reciprocally, meditation will help us to practice mortification well.”

73. - MEDITATION

To a Brother who had knelt down to ask pardon of the Community because for some time he did nothing at meditation and even had a hard time applying himself to it, M. Vincent spoke these words, “Brother, God sometimes allows us to lose the taste and attraction we used to have for meditation, and even to find it disagreeable. But that’s usually a trial He sends us and a test He wants to make of us, for which there’s no need to be upset or to yield to discouragement. There are good souls who are sometimes treated like that, just as many saints have also been. Yes, I know several very virtuous persons who have nothing but distaste and dryness in meditation; but, since they’re truly faithful to God, they make very good use of this, which goes a long way in their progress in virtue. It’s true that, when these feelings of distaste and dryness occur to those who are just beginning to devote themselves to meditation, there’s sometimes reason to fear that this may come from some negligence on their part; and that’s what you have to watch out for, Brother.”

Then the saint asked the Brother if he had headaches. When the latter replied that he indeed often suffered from headaches from the time, at the last retreat, he had tried to picture the topics of meditation in his mind, M. Vincent added, “Don’t do that, Brother; don’t try to picture in meditation what is not so by nature; for it’s self-love that’s being sought in that. We have to act in a spirit of faith at meditation, and reflect on the Mysteries and virtues on which we’re meditating in this spirit of faith—gently, humbly, not forcing the imagination, but using our will for affections and resolutions rather than our understanding in order to acquire knowledge.”

74. - MEDITATION

One of the Brothers, called to make Repetition of Prayer, admitted artlessly that he didn't have enough intelligence to meditate. Only one of the faculties of the soul—the will—helped him. As soon as the topic was proposed, with no attempt to reason, he would use his will to produce affections. He spent his time thanking God, asking pardon for his faults, stirring up in his heart shame and regret for having committed them, and imploring the grace to imitate Our Lord in some virtue; then he would take a few resolutions, etc. M. Vincent interrupted him: "Keep doing that, Brother, and don't worry about applying your understanding, which is done only to stir up the will, since your will is prompted, without these reflections, to affections and resolutions to practice virtue. May God grant you the grace to continue like that and to make you more and more faithful to all that He wills!"

75. - THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

"It's not enough for us to celebrate Mass, but we must also offer this Sacrifice with the greatest devotion possible, in accord with God's Will, conforming ourselves, as far as is in us, with His grace, to Jesus Christ offering himself, when He was on earth, as a sacrifice to His eternal Father. So then, Messieurs, let's strive to offer our sacrifices to God in the same spirit that Our Lord offered His, and as perfectly as our poor, wretched nature allows."

Conference 74. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VII, sect. I, p. 67, Repetition of Prayer.

Conference 75. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VIII, p. 72, excerpt.

76. - SILENCE

Motives:

M. Vincent stated that:

(1) Silence was very necessary in a Community, recalling that a great man of God had said that, if anyone wanted to preserve a Community, very exact silence had to be introduced into it, and disorders that slipped into Congregations were caused by breaking silence.

(2) Silence draws down many graces and blessings, both on Communities and on individuals, especially since keeping silence is nothing other than listening to God, speaking to Him, and being open to Him, setting ourselves apart from the commotion and conversation of others to hear Him better. So, that's the aim of silence—keeping quiet to allow God to act. *Ducam eam in solitudinem et loquar ad cor ejus.*¹

(3) It was great wisdom to speak appropriately; this was what Our Lord had done, taking the opportunity of the water the Samaritan woman was drawing from the well to speak to her about grace; and he exclaimed several times, saying, “Who will give us this gift of speaking appropriately?”

He reported that two Irish Jacobins,² who had come to stay at the home of M. X of Paris, had made such an impression on everyone by their silence that, after they left, everyone said with admiration, “They’re saints.” And he said that he couldn’t think about that without feeling a special warmth and reverence for those religious.

Means:

(1) To ask it of God;

(2) To reflect often on His words;

(3) To punish ourselves by imposing some penance on ourselves.

Conference 76. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 213, summary.

¹I will lead her into solitude and speak to her heart. Cf. Hos 2:16. (NAB)

²Dominicans.

77. - THE EXCELLENCE OF SPIRITUAL RETREATS

“We’re going to pray for those who have begun their retreat, that God may be pleased to renew them interiorly, help them to die to their own spirit, and give them His Spirit. Yes, a well-made retreat is a total renewal: the man who has made one as it should be made passes into another state. He’s no longer what he was; he becomes another man. We’ll ask God to be pleased to give us this spirit of renewal and that, with the help of His grace, we may strip ourselves of the old Adam in order to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ, so that we may do His most holy Will in all things.”

78. - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONDUCT WHILE TRAVELING

After I had received orders from M. Vincent to go with another priest to a distant province, he kept both of us in his room for a long time on the eve of our departure, advising us of what we had to do during the journey, which was to take 11 or 12 days, in company of the Toulouse courier, who was taking with him a large number of persons of every social status.

He recommended to us, among several other things, four in particular: first, never to fail to make mental prayer—even on horseback, if we didn’t have time to make it otherwise; second, to celebrate Holy Mass every day, as far as possible; third, to mortify our eyes while going through the country, especially in the towns, and our mouth as well by moderation at meals among people of the world; fourth, to teach the catechism to the male and female servants in the inns, and particularly to poor persons.

Conference 77. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VII, p. 59, excerpt.

Conference 78. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XXIV, p. 338.

79. - ADMONITIONS

“I declare that those who don’t inform the Superior of faults they’ve noted in some members of the Company, which lead to the ruin and disordered state of the said Company, are themselves guilty of the ruin and disordered state of the same Company and share in the sin. We have to be willing that the Superior be informed by others of all our faults, and that he correct us for them, either privately or publicly. Not only is that not contrary to the law and word of God, but is in conformity with the same law and word of God, as was decided by the Pope, assisted by several Doctors, from the time of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and at his entreaty and request. At various times Our Lord Jesus Christ himself corrected and reproved publicly those who followed Him. Furthermore, I myself must accept to be admonished by my Assistant, M. Portail; and, if I don’t improve, my Superior should take steps against me. Now, my Superior is the whole Company assembled. Yes, if I don’t correct myself of something scandalous that may lead to the ruin and destruction of the Company, or if I teach something contrary to Church doctrine, the Company must assemble and then take harsh measures against me with all the strictness it sees necessary, even expelling me from the same Company, even notifying the Archbishop of Paris about it, or writing to the Pope in Rome in order to rectify it, for they are also my Superiors. We have to do our utmost always to bring virtue to the highest degree possible and to see that it can be so, not by our own efforts but by recourse to God and frequent prayers.”

Conference 79. - Manuscript of Bro. Robineau, p. 135, excerpt. Cf. André Dodin, ed., *Monsieur Vincent raconté par son secrétaire*, no. 2328, p. 978. [Paris: O.E.I.L., 1991].

Louis Robineau, coadjutor Brother, born in Neuvy-en-Dunois (Eure-et-Loir), entered the Congregation of the Mission on November 8, 1642, at twenty-one years of age, and took his vows on November 1, 1650. He was Saint Vincent’s secretary for thirteen years; the notes he wrote for the Saint’s biographer are still in the archives.

80. - ENVY

M. Vincent said that only this vice could ruin the Company; that all external events and attacks of the devil would be incapable of causing a breach in it; that it was to be feared that a schism might form in the Church because of envy; that this might cause Our Lord to withdraw His Spirit from the clergy in order to give it to the laity; that this vice had to be laid low by humility and charity, and that we should make the virtues of others our own by love, whereas those who have those virtues and are proud of it are like those mules that carry gold and beautiful tapestries, but for someone else.

The motives are:

(1) The two causes of the death of Jesus are the envy of the devil and the envy of the Jews.

(2) To be envious is to find fault with the order of God, for, in fact, if we become angry because another is better provided for than we are, we attack not so much the person who has these advantages as the person who gives them to him; that's why God can say to us, *An oculus tuus nequam est, quia ego bonus sum?*¹

(3) To envy is to be sad that the blood of Jesus Christ is not in vain, for all spiritual and natural graces are due to Him, whereas by our sin we're deserving of hell.

(4) There is a sharing of good works in the Church. Would a merchant who has a partner be angry that the partner made a fine profit, since he is to benefit from it? Is one part of the body angry that perfect health is given to another part?

The *causes* and *occasions* of this sad envy are, for example, if I were to see that a person was skillful at what I am not; if he walked at a good pace and I had a hard time keeping up with him; if he sang well and did so in front of me, who can't sing; if he was abstemious at table and through propriety I wanted to follow him, whereas, through sensuality, I was unwilling to do it; if I saw something special or some privilege given to someone and I was saddened by it, etc.

The *remedies* are humility and mortification.

Conference 80. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 31, Repetition of Prayer, summary.

¹*Is your eye evil because I am good?* Cf. Mt 20:15. (NAB)

As for walking, think about Jesus carrying the Cross and also about what Our Lord said, *Si quis te angariaverit mille passus, fac et adhuc decem cum eo.*²

For humble duties: Jesus Christ worked with His hands; then, too, *propter nos egenus factus est*; ³ look at His life in the cold and in the heat. When our minds are troubled, we have to reflect, with Saint Paul, *Nondum usque ad sanguinem restitistis.*⁴

A different, but very appropriate, remedy is to shun human consolation and mortify the desire to be pitied; for, if I were to see someone better treated than me and that, in my opinion, people felt more sorry for him, I might think they had greater esteem for him, and that would be envy.

81. - SPIRITUAL SLOTH

Motives: Consider that our reprobation or our justification may perhaps depend on doing this action, for there is a certain justifying grace and, if we respond to it, we can be assured. Sometimes we think we've done enough; we have to reflect that the Jews said to Our Lord, *Si Filius Dei es, descende de cruce*, ¹ and yet, He did not come down. We don't see the benefit to a person, either at the time of his conversion or some time afterward but at a certain moment of temptation or tribulation; and as the person is during that time, so he is afterward.

You have to be strong. You'll find all the practices distasteful; you won't dare tell anyone about this or talk to your Director; this results in exclusive friendships. If someone says one word to you, you'll be ready to answer him with two; you'll find yourself in a state

²Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for ten miles. Cf. Mt 5:41. (NAB)

³For our sake he made himself poor. Cf. 2 Cor 8:9. (NAB)

⁴You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. Cf. Heb 12:4. (NAB)

Conference 81. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 41, summary.

¹If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. Cf. Mt 27:40. (NAB)

of profound melancholy; and our salvation depends on the use we make of this state.

The first thing the devil does is to blind us and take away our good sentiments, and our confidence in God and in those to whom He has entrusted us. We have to pray for those whom we see in that state so that, when we ourselves are in it, we'll be able to obtain from God, through their prayers, the grace to make good use of it and to imitate in this Our Lord, *qui passus est pro nobis, relinquens exemplum, ut, quemadmodum ille fecit, ita et nos faciamus*,² as when He wept over the city of Jerusalem.

81a. - SPIRITUAL SLOTH AND VANITY: CAUSES OF LEAVING

“In most of those who have gone back on their promises regarding their vocation I’ve noticed laxity in two things: the first is morning rising, to which they aren’t exact; the second is vanity regarding their hair, letting it grow too long, which gradually leads to other similar vanities.”

82. - DEATH OF A PERSON CLOSE TO THE COMPANY

One day, after learning of the death of someone closely attached to the Company, M. Vincent said to his men, “I’m sure you’ve been deeply affected by the loss of this person who was so dear to us. But God be praised! You’ve also told Him that He did well to take him from us, and that you wouldn’t want it any other way, since such was His good pleasure.”

²Who suffered for us, leaving the example that, as he did, we also should do. Cf. 1 Pt 2:21. (NAB)

Conference 81a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XXIV, sect. I, p. 342-43, excerpt.

Conference 82. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. V, sect. II, p. 48, excerpt.

82a. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

December 27

M. Vincent said that curiosity was the plague of the spiritual life—a plague greater than there are grains of sand in the sea—and that it was through the curiosity of our first father that death, war, plague, famine, and the other woes that weigh down human nature had entered the world.

He urged us, using the same words Saint John used with his disciples, *Filii, diligite alterutrum*,² and said that the Company would last as long as charity remained in it. He pronounced many curses on the man who lacked charity, saying that he would be the cause not only of the destruction of the Company but also of any slackening or lessening of holiness in the same Company—that is, if, through his fault, he would be the reason for its being less perfect. He also told us, concerning Saint Peter, who was worried about what would become of Saint John, that charity had made him ask that question. Lastly, he said that charity was a sign of predestination.

M. Vincent next spoke about inspiration, saying that it was an interior impulse of our soul prompting us to avoid some evil or to do some good; in other words, an interior word of God to our heart, which He uses when exhortations, readings, or good example fail to move us. It is, he says, what is recorded in the Gospel of that master who, when he sent off his servants and saw that they hadn't made any progress, willed to speak to them in person and through his son.³

He added that those who make little account of this interior word, have one of the marks of reprobation, trampling underfoot the Blood of Our Lord, who merited this grace for us by His Pas-

Conference 82a. - *Recueil autographié*, p. 213, Repetition of Prayer.

¹Subheading: Curiosity, charity, obedience to inspirations.

²Children, love one another. Cf. 1 Jn 3:11. (NAB)

³Cf. Mt 21:37. (NAB)

sion, and that they're resisting the Holy Spirit, which is a sin that can't be forgiven either in this world or in the next. In a word, that it was not being God's sheep: *nam oves meae vocem meam audiunt*.⁴

M. Vincent also told us that the devil would transform himself into an angel of light and give us inspirations that appeared to come from God. To recognize and discern them, he noted that, with regard to impulses we feel for extraordinary things, we must always have recourse to spiritual directors; and for ordinary impulses, we should examine whether or not the inspiration was accompanied by haste because *non in commotione Dominus*,⁵ whether or not it is contrary to the Commandments of God or of the Church, to Christian maxims, or to the regulations and holy customs of the house and the Community. If any one of these conditions is present, then it's no longer an inspiration but a temptation.⁶

⁴*For my sheep hear my voice.* Cf. Jn 10:27. (NAB)

⁵*The Lord is not in the earthquake.* Cf. 1 Kgs 19:11. (NAB)

⁶In Abelly (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. V, sect. I, p. 39), we find the following words which might come from this Repetition of Prayer: "Among the many thoughts and sentiments that come to us constantly, there are some that seem good, but, nevertheless, do not come from God and are not pleasing to Him. How then, can we discern them? We have to examine them, have recourse to God in prayer to ask for His enlightenment, consider their motives, purpose and means to see if everything is seasoned with His good pleasure. Then we should mention them to wise persons and take the advice of those who guide us and are guardians of the treasures of the knowledge and wisdom of God. In doing what they advise, we do the Will of God."

83. - RETREAT RECOMMENDATIONS

1632

To give ourselves entirely to God to serve Him in the vocation to which it has pleased Him to call us.

To have a high regard for our vocation and be more attached to it than to any other state in the world, humbling ourselves if we're not attached to it, seeing that persons outside the Community have such great esteem for it and that we're being requested for several places.

To have a deep love for all the Regulations, considering them as means God presents to us to grow in holiness in our vocation; to formulate serious plans and firm resolutions to keep them meticulously. If, by chance, there are some that go against the grain, to try to overcome and mortify ourselves in that; above all, to be very careful not to let our aversion be apparent to others in any way whatsoever.

To strive for a warm, cordial friendship with all the men in the house; and, should it happen that we have an aversion to someone, to say nothing about it to anyone but the Superior and to try by every means to overcome ourselves in that.

All those appointed as Superiors on the missions must see that the Regulations are observed exactly there.

To have great respect for all those given us as Superiors and show that we're glad to have them give us orders and correct us for our faults.

To have great respect for one another; and, although we should be cheerful during recreation, we should still be respectful; therefore, it is highly recommended that we not touch one another, use familiar language, or speak bad Latin, all of which leads to silliness.

Never to get angry or correct others publicly, especially in what concerns preaching, teaching catechism, or hearing confessions.

Never to mention in the presence of others the faults and imperfections noted in these; but, if we think the admonition may be use-

Conference 83. - Municipal Library of Bordeaux, MS. 803, pp. 17-23, Departmental Archives of Aube, S.G. 39, copy. The author of the manuscript was a member of the Congregation of the Mission in 1665.

ful, to give it privately to the person at fault, with the greatest possible charity and gentleness. If the matter is serious, tell the Superior.

It is highly advisable to praise someone only rarely and prudently, at least when he is present.

To have a great desire to attain perfection and, in order to do this, to encourage one another in our conversations, always praising virtue and mortification. If we have an aversion to someone, we will be content with telling the Superior or Director about it; above all, never to speak of it to others, either in public or in private and, even less, to make light of the virtue of those who practice it.

To be very mortified and to make ourselves indifferent in everything, particularly with regard to food, lodging, and clothing; if we need something, we can tell the man whose duty it is to provide it, and he will inform the Superior. We must never discuss whether we've eaten well or poorly, or been well or poorly housed or clothed.

During missions, to observe inviolably all of the following:

(1) to rise at four o'clock and go to bed at nine;

(2) to make our meditation;

(3) to say our Office with the others;

(4) to go to and from church with the others;

(5) to say Mass when it's our turn;

(6) not to leave church without permission, telling the Superior the reason;

(7) to have reading during meals;

(8) to hold Chapter every Friday;

(9) never to speak about confession in public or to propose any case of conscience concerning it, without discussing this with the Superior.

When there is any dispute to be settled in which there might be some difficulty, not to get involved in it without consulting the Superior, so as to do what he thinks proper.

When we ask the Superior for something, to be prepared for a refusal and to accept it willingly if it's given us; to be very careful not to murmur or show any resentment, or to say that, from now on, we'll never ask for another thing.

84. - RETREAT RECOMMENDATIONS

1635

To submit willingly and with indifference to all Superiors assigned to us, especially during missions.

To honor the poverty of O[ur] L[ord] with regard to food; to be satisfied with what is set down by order of the Superior, never complaining, or, even less, interfering in that.

To avoid as the plague of the Community all cliques, factions, and exclusive friendships.

Never to discuss the government of the house or the business of private individuals.

To be attached and exact to the Regulations.

Never, during missions, to omit reading at table, either entirely or in part, even after having said our good-byes or closed the mission.

Not to speak about sermons, catechism lessons, and confessions in order to praise or blame someone who might have done well or poorly in them.

Not to aim at establishing our reputation with people, avoiding, for that reason, visits and conversations with important persons and not trying to get them to write to us, except for business of the [Confraternity of] Charity¹ or youth ministry.

Conference 84. - Municipal Library of Bordeaux, MS. 803, pp. 24-27; Departmental Archives of Aube, S.G. 39, copy.

¹The Confraternity of Charity, often called simply *the Charity*, was an association founded for the purpose of helping sick and/or poor persons in the parishes. Begun in 1617 in Châtillon and established in 1629 in Saint-Sauveur parish, it was so successful that nearly every Pastor in the city and suburbs of Paris had hastened to start one in his parish. Under the impulse of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, which favored the movement, several Charities came into being; the majority of them were served by the Daughters of Charity. The Pastors, who were the directors of the Charities, based their particular rules on those established by Saint Vincent; these rules varied according to the needs of the parishes. Some of them are preserved in the Arsenal Library (MS. 2565) and in the Bibl. Nat. (R. 26.015-26.018, 27.199-27.208). See also Henri-François-Simon de Doncourt, *Remarques historiques sur l'église et la paroisse de Saint-Sulpice* (3 vols., Paris: N. Crapart, 1773), III, pp. 1ff. The activities of the Confraternities were limited to the particular parish; however, the one at the Hôtel-Dieu, founded in 1633, was not a parochial institution. It met local and national needs, e.g., those of the foundlings and the provinces devastated by the Fronde, which its director, Saint Vincent, brought to the attention of its members, the Ladies of Charity.

Not to undertake any difficult reconciliation or any that demands time, without an order from the Superior.

To show great honor and respect to the Pastors and Vicars of the places where we go; to undertake nothing against their will or even without informing them of it and getting their approval, especially for important matters like the establishment of the Charity, children's Communion, processions, and major reconciliations.

Never to go to someone's house for a meal during the mission, not even outside the time of the mission, without great necessity and the permission of the Superior.

Not to invite or allow anyone to eat with us during the mission, except the Pastors, and that very rarely.

To accept no gift of any kind, no matter how small or large it may be.

Not to vote on difficulties that have to be settled, but leave that up to the Superior, who will conform himself in that to the way it's done in the Mission and as God will inspire him.

Not to have the special ceremonies and banquets at processions and children's Communion.

To be willing to leave the sermons or catechism classes we have begun during a mission in order to let others speak in our place; even to accept being interrupted during the shorter catechism lessons and to have someone else replace us, if the Superior thinks it advisable.

When we hear the confessions of married women or girls, not to get too close to them and, in line with that, to have those who are nearby move back. In addition to the care each of us will take personally in this regard, the Superior will go from time to time to see if this is being observed, and will set things in order.

To remind one another charitably and humbly of the failings we've noticed, and see that this practice is in force and growing stronger among us.

85. - RECOMMENDATIONS AT CHAPTER¹

October 29, 1638

After a Brother had accused himself of having spoken a little insolently to the Prior,² M. Vincent said that this very serious fault (that's what he called it) wasn't the only one and had doubtless been preceded by many other acts of disrespect and impudent words toward members of the house before reaching this point. He strongly criticized this fault, adding that we were to consider the Prior as our father.

When another man accused himself of having given admonitions for things in which he had some self-interest, M. Vincent said, first of all, that this was a good sign, that a person who gives admonitions wanted to advance in virtue, and that this was a virtue, but virtue lay in the middle because the two extremes were vicious. He stated he had noticed that, if there were any contentious, unsettled, and unmortified persons in a Community, it was those who never gave any admonitions, for fear of receiving some themselves. He also said that it was dangerous to give too many, and because of that he gave as a rule that a person should be admonished twice at the most, and even then it shouldn't be done the second time without due deliberation and a thorough examination of the action or thing for which we intended to give the admonition. He added that, to examine an admonition and to give it legitimately, these circumstances had to be observed: (1) whether there was any antipathy involved, and whether this antipathy was not the reason for our giving the admonition; (2) whether we may not have some self-interest in the matter; (3) to see if it's a real fault; and, if it's something insignificant, to be sure that it wasn't done in haste; if the person did it only once or twice, we shouldn't admonish him—no one is so holy that he doesn't commit some fault; (4) to see whether it's not done

Conference 85. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 1.

¹*Subheading:* Respect due to the Prior of Saint-Lazare; admonitions at Chapter; gracious condescension with the retreatants; punctuality; confidentiality regarding what is said at Chapter; avoiding the spirit of murmuring.

²Adrien Le Bon.

through some impulse of revenge to get even with our brother because of an admonition he may have given us. He added that sometimes we shouldn't admonish a person for looking sad because it may be that the man who appears sad to us is being recollected.

He also said that we should be careful not to lie when we say, while admonishing our brother, that we're doing it in a spirit of humility and charity; this may happen if one of the four above mentioned circumstances is lacking. Now, to admonish someone in a spirit of humility and charity is to consider ourselves more guilty than the man we're accusing or against whom we're bearing witness in reminding him of his faults, and to do it with the desire to help him become more holy.

After someone had accused himself of having put a retreatant off to another day rather than on the day he had wanted to begin his retreat, under pretext that there were too many of them, M. Vincent said that we had to honor the great kindness of Our Lord, who allowed penitents to come to him no matter when they presented themselves.

He called it *holy discourtesy* to leave someone when the bell called us to some exercise, no matter what the rank of the persons with whom we were talking at the time.

M. Vincent recommended that we not discuss, either inside or outside the house, what had been said at Chapter, although in the olden days the first Christians did this and declared their faults in public. Unfortunately, however, since some scandal later arose from this, private and auricular confession was prescribed; he said that the way of living in Community was the image of the way the first Christians acted because, when they were received into the Church, they gave up their possessions and brought them to the feet of the Apostles.³ He also stated that we had to be on our guard against the spirit of murmuring because this is absolutely opposed to charity, which unites hearts by affection and cordiality, and that this spirit was the cause of all the disorder brought on us by the sin of Adam.

³Cf. Acts 4,34-35. (NAB)

86. - PERSEVERANCE IN VOCATION

October 29, 1638

(1) God is the one who calls us and who, from all eternity, has destined us to be Missioners, since He didn't bring us to birth either one hundred years earlier or later but precisely at the time of the institution of this Company. Consequently, we must neither seek nor expect rest, satisfaction, and blessings anywhere else but in the [Congregation of the] Mission, since that's the only place God wants and desires us to be—presuming, of course, that our vocation is genuine and not founded on self-interest, or to free ourselves from the inconveniences of life, or from any other motive of human respect.

(2) We're the first ones to be called. Those who enter a Congregation during the first century of its establishment—within the first hundred years—are called the first members. Since, then, we're the first ones chosen to lead the lost sheep back into the fold, what will happen if we leave? Where do we think we could go? *Quo ibo a spiritu tuo et quo a facie tua fugiam?*¹ If a King had chosen some soldiers from among the others to lead the assault, wouldn't this honor be a powerful motive to discourage them from wanting to take flight?

(3) In this vocation, we're very much in conformity with Our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to have made His principal aim, in coming into the world, to assist poor people and to take care of them. *Misit me evangelizare pauperibus.*² And if we ask Our Lord, "What did you come to do on earth?" "To assist the poor." "Anything else?" "To assist the poor," etc. Now, He had only poor persons in His company and He devoted himself very little to cities, almost always conversing with and instructing village people. So, are we not very fortunate to belong to the Mission for the same purpose that caused God to become man? And if someone were to

Conference 86. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 3.

¹Where can I hide from your spirit, where can I flee from your face? Cf. Ps 139:7. (NAB)

²He sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor. Cf. Lk 4:18-19. Is 61:1ff. (NAB)

question a Missioner, wouldn't it be a great honor for him to be able to say with Our Lord, *Misit me evangelizare pauperibus?* I'm here to catechize, instruct, hear confessions, and assist persons who are poor. Now, what does this conformity with Our Lord bring about with it if not predestination? *Nam quos praescivit et praedestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui.*³ If we abandon our vocation, it's greatly to be feared that it's the flesh or the devil that takes us away from it. Do we want to obey them? For, since God has called us to it, it's unlikely that He's the one who is taking us from it. God doesn't contradict himself. However, we don't know God's secrets and we don't want to make any judgment, but we'll always say that a withdrawal like that is suspect and dubious.

Means:

(1) We must ask God for this confirmation or strengthening in our vocation; it's a gift of God.

(2) We must have a high regard for our vocation.

(3) To keep exactly all the Regulations of the house; for, even though there are few of them, there's not one that isn't important.

(4) Not to allow anyone to criticize either Superiors or the way the house is governed.

(5) To live together in great charity and friendliness.

He added, in order to console the serving Brothers⁴ in their vocation, that, along with the priests, they, too, were leading a life in conformity with that of Our Lord and were imitating the hidden life of Our Lord, during which He did manual labor, working in the carpenter's shop and doing the household tasks like a hired servant; so, in this way they imitate the life He led for thirty years, and the priests in their duties imitate the life He led for only three and a half years. The Brothers were honoring the life of Our Lord as a servant, and the priests were honoring His priesthood; consequently, conformity with Our Lord was to be found in both callings. Furthermore, because of the union between the members of one same

³*For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.* Cf. Rom 8:29. (NAB)

⁴The coadjutor Brothers.

body, which causes what one member does to be shared by the others, it's certain that the Brothers hear confessions with the confessors, preach with the preachers, evangelize poor persons with the Priests of the Mission who evangelize them, and are, therefore, in the conformity with Our Lord Jesus Christ mentioned earlier.

87. - RECOMMENDATIONS AT CHAPTER¹

December 17, 1638

After a Brother had accused himself of a tendency to sigh, M. Vincent said that sighing comes from three or four causes: some sighs came from an impulse of the Holy Spirit by the holy compunction He diffused in our soul at the sight of our faults, or of hell, or paradise, etc., and these are not blameworthy. Others, which he called *hatuosité* [sic] come from a certain disease of the spleen; still others come from a habit of sighing in the zeal and fervor of prayer and devotion; other persons deliberately sigh to excite themselves to devotion. He added that we can accuse ourselves of sighs of the last three kinds and admonish others at Chapter for them, after, however, discussing this with the Superior; still, it shouldn't be done unless the man who is sighing does it too frequently.

He said also that we could encourage and invite others to say something edifying; that was in reference to an admonition that had been given because a Brother had said, when another Brother arrived, "Ah! Here comes Brother N., who'll have something good to say to us!" He added that the usual greeting of the ancient desert Fathers and the first Christians was to say to one another, *Dic nobis verbum aedificationis*.² He gave instructions that no further admonitions should be given on things that were good in themselves, un-

Conference 87. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 5.

¹*Subheading:* Sighs and groans during exercises of piety; not admonishing someone at Chapter for things good in themselves, unless there has been some excess; not inviting outsiders to eat in the refectory without permission; asking the heavenly court to help us to know our faults.

²*Tell us something edifying.*

less there was excess or defect, or were done too often or at the wrong time.

When someone accused himself of taking the liberty of having an outsider eat in the refectory, M. Vincent commented on this fault, saying that he was trying gradually to do away with this abuse that had slipped into the community, namely, of so easily inviting outsiders into the house and having them stay to eat; that this wasn't done in any religious or private house and wasn't customary, and that this great facility had made some outsiders bold enough to come into the refectory on their own and make a joke of it afterward. Property, he said, wasn't left by the founders for this purpose and, since we were only stewards, we had to be accountable for it to God. He said that a son would be very careful not to invite someone to eat and drink if he hadn't asked and obtained his father's permission. Bringing strangers in boldly and thoughtlessly in this way would be to act like the master of the house; and he gave a few reasons for which he thought other Communities did not tolerate such an abuse.

The first is that being in a refectory after meal times and having people eat there at every turn is to make it into a tavern, and that's scandalous. The second is that this inconveniences the Officers, who, having other work to do, are distracted from it by the attention and service they have to give to these unexpected arrivals. The third is that, since the number and size of the portions are counted, when that happens, they have to take from the community what's needed for those people because they have nothing else prepared.

M. Vincent concluded that this custom, which should never have been started, had to be stopped and that it's been kept up because of an abuse made of the kindness of Superiors or because of the very audacity of the servants.

He said that if we really wanted to know our faults in order to correct them, we could turn interiorly to the Celestial Court, asking Our Lord Jesus Christ, His holy Mother, our Guardian Angel, and our patron saints to alert us to our failings, adding that this practice was excellent and would be efficacious.

88. - RECOMMENDATIONS AT CHAPTER¹

January 19, 1642

God gives us His graces according to our needs. God is a fountain from which each of us draws water according to the need we have of it. Just as a person who needs six buckets of water draws six, and someone who needs three draws three, a bird, who needs only a billful, just dips in his beak, and a pilgrim scoops up a handful to slake his thirst. That's how God acts with us.

We have to have great devotion to being faithful to reading a chapter of the New Testament and, in the beginning, to produce acts (1) of adoration, adoring the word of God and His truth; (2) of entering into the sentiments with which Our Lord pronounced them, and consenting to these truths; (3) of resolving to put these same truths into practice. For example, I'll read, "Blessed are the poor in spirit,"² and will resolve and give myself to God to practice this truth on such and such an occasion. Likewise, when I read, "Blessed are the meek,"³ I'll give myself to God to practice gentleness. Above all, we have to be careful not to read by way of study, saying, "This passage will help me with a certain sermon," but read simply for our own growth. We mustn't be discouraged if, after reading something several times for one month, two months, or six months, we're not moved by it. It will happen that one time we'll have a little glimmer of light, another day a greater one, and an even greater one when we need it. One word alone is capable of converting us; all we need is one, just as that was all Saint Anthony needed.

Conference 88. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 7.

¹*Subheading:* God gives His graces in proportion to individual needs; daily reading of a chapter of the New Testament.

²Cf. Mt 5:3. (NAB)

³Cf. Mt 5:5. (NAB)

89. - TRIALS AND ATTACHMENTS¹

February 19, 1642

M. Vincent told us not to be surprised to see ourselves in deplorable states of despair and to have horrible, abominable thoughts. All those states do not come from ourselves, but God permits them in order to test us; furthermore, those states will pass: *Numquam in eodem statu permanet*.² He gave an example of this in Mme de Chantal,³ who always thought she was in a deplorable state, with the result that she saw only detestable things in her soul and didn't dare to reflect on her actions so that she wouldn't see so many sins of vanity, human respect, self-satisfaction, etc.

He said also that people, especially a Missioner, had to be constantly mortified, that we had to cut, prune, sever, and rid ourselves of the attachments we might have for little things—even for certain prayers—and that this was being an idolater of those particular objects. He gave us the example of a gallant nobleman.⁴ One day, when this man was examining himself to see if he had any attachments, he asked himself if he might not be attached to his friends, his hat, and so on for other things, but he felt that he wasn't and would willingly give them up for God. When he examined himself regarding his sword, with which he had conducted himself so valiantly, he did feel attached to it, and to rid himself of this, he took it, struck it against a rock, broke it in two, and no longer used a

Conference 89. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 7.

¹Subheading: Not to be surprised at the trials God sends; the need to break attachments.

²*He never continues in the same state*. Cf. Jb 14:2. (D-RB)

³Jane Frances Frémiot was born in Dijon on January 23, 1572. She and her husband Baron de Chantal had four children. Widowed at a very young age, she placed herself under the guidance of Francis de Sales and with him established the Order of the Visitation. The foundation of the First Monastery in Paris drew her to that city where she remained 1619-22. There she became acquainted with Vincent de Paul, whom she requested of Jean-François de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, as Superior of her daughters. Until her death in Moulins on December 13, 1641, as she was returning from a trip to Paris, she kept in close contact with M. Vincent, whom she consulted for spiritual direction and the business affairs of her Community. (Cf. Henri de Maupas du Tour, *La Vie de la Vénérable Mère Jeanne-Françoise Frémiot, fondatrice, première Mère et Religieuse de l'Ordre de la Visitation de Sainte-Marie* [new ed., Paris: Siméon Piget, 1653].)

⁴The Comte de Rougemont (cf. X, 142-43 and XII, Conf. 205).

sword, abandoning himself entirely to the Providence of God and entrusting himself to God's holy mercy.

90. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

March 18, 1642

M. Vincent said that, if there was anything we should ask for the Company, it was obedience and humility; that we should weep when we were applauded for something since Our Lord said, *Vae vobis, cum benedixerint vobis homines*; ² that each one of us should always choose the last place, in the belief we must have that we are the least of all and that what a man thought of himself should be applied to the Company, believing that it's the least in the Church of God and the most insignificant of all Companies, and if it didn't have these sentiments, God would withdraw His grace from it. He also said that it would be foolish to imagine that the Company was the one about which Saint Vincent Ferrer prophesied when he said that in the latter times a Company of priests would be seen which was to be of great benefit to the Church of God.

He said that we had to love the contempt and embarrassment of not being successful in sermons and in ministry; that when we see people who might be pretentious aspire to honor, we should run from them as if we were running from a fire. For this reason he ordered the velvet funeral pall covering the corpse of our Bro. Le Boeuf³ to be removed, saying that it smacked too much of worldly pomp.

Conference 90. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 8, Repetition of Prayer.

¹*Subheading*: Humility.

²*Woe to you when men speak well of you.* Cf. Lk 6:26. (NAB)

³Éloi Le Boeuf, born in Roye (Somme), entered the Congregation of the Mission on September 24, 1641. In *Notices*, vols. I and V (Supplement), he is listed as a priest, but no date of ordination is given.

91. - MODERATION AND SILENCE AT MEALS

March 21, 1642

M. Vincent spoke with great enthusiasm of the benefits of moderation and of watering our wine well; that acting otherwise was sensual and that the Company had been greatly scandalized because of the disturbance a Missioner had caused by drinking too much; that this had become known and that God permitted these faults to put us on our guard and to show us that there were many faults in the Company.

That same day, he spoke just as strongly against those who talked at table during the reading; several times—even fifteen or twenty times—he repeated these words, “Talking at table during reading! *Quoi!* Shall it be said that, in imitation of this Company, several good members of the clergy have reading at table and listen avidly to it, and that, nevertheless, we fall into this fault, and are doing so at the origin of the Company! Ah, that these faults should occur at the beginning of the Company!”

92. - THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

March 22, 1642

M. Vincent said that virtues had to be deeply imprinted on our hearts; that we had to begin with faith, never allowing any reasoning contrary to virtue, to Holy Scripture, or to the meaning and explanation of the Church to enter our minds. Next he said that we had to have great trust in God, mistrust of ourselves, and great love of God. On this point, he gave the example of a nobleman, who had formerly lived very freely and who was now so filled with love of

God that he couldn't do anything but love Him; his mind is so drawn to love of God that he can say, in a certain sense, that the souls of the damned and the devils do not have as much hatred for God as this nobleman has the inclination to love him.

**93. - REFLECTIONS OF A CONFRERE FROM REPETITION
OF PRAYER¹**

June 26, 1642

Monsieur,

I thought I should share with you some of the good news our very good and most honorable Father gave us this morning at Repetition of Prayer, concerning our confreres in Annecy. He told us that M. . . . , together with another member of the Company and three from the seminary, were having great success in the mission they were giving, that M. . . . and someone else from the Community were giving another mission, and that Messrs. Tholard² and Bourdet³ (the brother of the one you met), had remained at home and conducted the last ordination retreat very successfully. He had us admire God's goodness to the last two men, especially to M. Bourdet, who, while he was here, was unable to succeed in any exterior ministry; most of the men even thought that he had no common sense and people were afraid to have him make Repetition of

Conference 93. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 10.

¹From a letter a Missioner wrote to one of his confreres about the work of the Missioners in Annecy, the edifying death of the Comtesse de Saint Paul, and the saint's humility.

²Jacques Tholard was born in Auxerre (Yonne) on June 10, 1615, and entered the Congregation of the Mission on November 20, 1638. He was ordained a priest on December 17, 1639, and died after 1671. Throughout his life, in Annecy (1640-46); in Tréguier, where he was Superior (1648-53); in Troyes (1658-60); at Saint-Lazare, in Fontainebleau, and elsewhere, he manifested the qualities of an excellent Missioner. During the generalate of René Alméras, he was Visitor of the Provinces of France and Lyons.

³Étienne Bourdet, born in Saint-Babel (Puy-le-Dôme) on April 27, 1615, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 9, 1638, and was ordained a priest on June 2, 1640. He was Superior in Toul (1641-42) and took his vows on June 10, 1648.

Prayer. M. de la Salle⁴ or someone else had often even suggested that he be dismissed; on the other hand, he was always very recollected and obedient. I had the happiness of knowing him for a time in the seminary, and he appeared to me as our good Father described him. “Yet, look at him now,” he said to us, “guiding the ordinands, of whom there were around thirty-nine this last time, men endowed with greater intelligence and wisdom than the ones in this area.”

Those are the subjects of wonder and admiration our good Father proposed to us today. Next, he encouraged us to have great confidence in God, who has always been pleased to work wonders through little things, adding that we should strive earnestly for humility and obedience. What incited me even more to write to you, however, is that he told us that, while he was reading the letters written by Messrs. Bourdet and Tholard, his heart was urging him to come into the seminary and to cry out to all our confreres that they should leave in order to go and work in the country, that they had enough learning and competence, and that God wanted to make use of them. These are his words: “Come on, brothers, let’s go to serve our good Master.”

He had another impulse, namely, to send to Rome those who were not old enough for priesthood, to obtain permission from His Holiness to be ordained under the age. I can’t tell you with what enthusiasm and abundance of the Spirit of God that was said, and with what fire and forcefulness; all I can say is that my heart was so overjoyed and contented by it; nevertheless, he complained that he didn’t feel this strong impulse, that perhaps he had committed some sin and God had withdrawn His graces. I leave you to reflect that, if my hard heart was softened by this, you can just imagine what all

⁴Jean de la Salle, whom Saint Vincent calls a “great Missioner,” and whom the Bishop of Beauvais considered the “most gifted expositor” he had ever known (cf. **XII**. Conf. 210), was born in Seux (Somme) on September 10, 1598, and offered his services to Saint Vincent in April 1626. In 1631 he preached in Champagne; in 1634, 1635, and 1636 he ministered in Gironde and the surrounding areas. When the Internal Seminary of Saint-Lazare opened in June 1637, he was entrusted with its direction. The following year he went back to giving missions, after which he was engaged in the ordinands’ retreats until the end of his life. He died on October 9, 1639, to the great regret of Saint Vincent, who lost in him one of his best workers.

the members of the Company felt! All our good Brothers, to whom this talk didn't seem to be addressed directly, were delighted by it.

On another occasion, he told us about the death of that virtuous Comtesse de Saint-Paul,⁵ who, despite having been a Huguenot and a Princess, when Our Lord was brought to her she knelt at the foot of the bed to adore Him and cried out from there, "You know, my God, that I'm indifferent to everything other than to love You and to do Your Will, and, on the contrary, that I'm ready and willing to do it entirely." From that our good Father drew reasons why we should be ashamed for being so stubborn in resisting God's Will, in doing our own, in not acceding to that of Superiors, or wanting to go on the missions, etc. And a woman is teaching us this lesson!

That same day, at the same repetition, when one of our good Brothers said that he was ashamed of profiting so little from the good example and marvelous things he saw in M. Vincent, the latter let that go by, but after the repetition he said, "Brother, it's a practice among us never to praise anyone in his presence," stating further that he was truly a wonder, but a wonder of malice, more wicked than the devil, and that the devil hadn't merited being in hell as much as he did. And he added that he wasn't exaggerating.

94. - REFLECTIONS OF A CONFRERE FROM CHAPTER¹

June 27, 1642

Monsieur,

. . . . To the recommendation M. Vincent was making regarding M. Alméras,² he added that we had to pray fervently, asking God to give him an abundant measure of His Spirit so that he could share it

⁵Anne de Caumont, a noted Lady of Charity.

Conference 94. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 12.

¹Excerpt from the letter of Missioner to one of his confreres concerning the duty of praying for Superiors.

²Director of the Internal Seminary.

with others. If the child at the breast could speak, he would ask that his mother be well fed so that he could receive nourishment from her; likewise, that's how it should be with subjects, since Superiors and Directors are like the breasts that must nurse others. If the conduit of our house is cracked, we have no water; therefore, we have to ask God to see that there are no obstacles in our Superiors and Directors, who are the conduits.

95. - UNION AMONG HOUSES OF THE COMPANY¹

June 27, 1642

Monsieur,

The subject of this evening's conference seemed so important to me for the welfare and maintenance of the Company, and the reasons given there were so clearly stated to us on these topics, that I feel it would be unconscionable of me if I didn't share them with you. The subject was union among houses of the Company. The first reason given was that all of us were Missioners and form only one body; therefore, just as there was a very close connection among the parts of the body, there had to be a similar union among the members of the Community. This union should extend to the observance of the same Regulations, the same way of acting, the same practices, and the same manner of preaching, catechizing, and hearing confessions. Above all, this union should be engraved on our hearts so that we may have the same will and sentiments.

The second is that, by means of this union, we wouldn't be looking for the petty satisfactions nature demands, as, for example, wanting to go to one house rather than to another in order to live there in greater freedom, since the same practices and observances would be seen in all the houses.

Conference 95. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 12.

¹Letter from a Missioner to one of his confreres.

Mention was also made of the union among the first Christians, *Erat cor unum et anima una*² among them, and the union of the Church in the sacraments, the Holy Sacrifice, and ceremonies.

The second point concerned the means of having this union. Here's what was mentioned by our good and most honored Father, who didn't speak about the motives. He stated that the first and foremost means was to ask it of God, the Father of unions and the Unifier, and that He was the one who united hearts. "Well then," he said, "let's ask Him for it!"

The second means was to dispose our hearts toward all those in the Company and to have a high regard for all the members who compose it.

Here, more or less, are his words regarding the third on which he insisted: "Always speak favorably of all the houses in the Company and never say, 'They do this or that'; no, never—God preserve us from that! O Messieurs, who will give us the spirit of our poor foundress!³ I can give this testimony: not only did she never say anything bad about anyone, but she never criticized anything whatsoever and found everything good. O Messieurs, who will give us a charity like that, which finds everything good! Who will give us this virtue, even the secular one! The late wife of the General of the Galleys had the practice of never speaking ill of the absent; M. Portail is aware of this; he knew her as I did. I never heard her say anything disparaging of the absent; on the contrary, she was their champion, skillfully turning aside any talk that tended toward gossip.

"How mean and unworthy of upright persons it is to find no good in anything! You see, Messieurs, almost everything we criticize is only so in our imagination. No, no, it's because we're mistaken. The bleary-eyed see everything fuzzy; that's how it is for those who find fault with everything; passion blinds their reason. Let's look at the good side of everything; let's never concentrate on the faults of others; if we've seen something wrong, let's forget

²*There was one heart and one mind among them.* Cf. Acts 4:32. (NAB)

³Madame de Gondi, wife of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, General of the Galleys.

about it and never mention it to anyone else; let's not rash judge our brothers' intentions—why and how they're doing a certain thing. Oh, I'm lancing the abscess! How I wish we had this holy practice of finding everything good and that it might be said that in the Church of God there's a Company that professes to be closely united and never to say a bad word about the absent; that it might be said of the Mission that it's a Company that finds nothing to criticize in its confreres! Honestly, I'd have a higher regard for that than all the missions, sermons, ministries with the ordinands, and every other blessing God has given the Company, since the image of the Most Holy Trinity would be imprinted more deeply upon us. There are Companies, Messieurs, that make it a challenge as to who will be the most virtuous. Oh! From today on, may this Little Company take up the challenge of who will say the most good, of who will defend the absent. If someone does the opposite in our presence, let's throw ourselves at his feet. Ah, Messieurs, if we did this just once, who could harm us? Will it be men? They'll be helpless. Will it be the devils? They're powerless against charity; it makes them run away. O Messieurs, who will give us that! *O mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* The Company would last until the end of the world. May it please Jesus Christ the Unifier to diffuse this spirit in the Company today at this conference!

“As for the means of writing and communicating by letter that was mentioned, I ask the Company to please discontinue that; I want to give it some more thought. It's true, as people say, that it's a holy custom, that the Jesuits make great use of it and have a Rule on it; I asked them about this, and the day before yesterday I discussed it with one of the oldest members, who told me that some men benefited greatly from it, but that it also caused some serious inconveniences. In fact, there are three or four men whom God has given a blessing to write. We were all delighted and wonderfully moved by a letter that one of the members of this community wrote to the Richelieu house, which set our hearts afire and gave us reason for having this conference; we've even held three of them on it; nevertheless, what I learned from one of the older men makes me persist

in my opinion. So, please discontinue that; the Company doesn't have the grace for it; I've known only two or three men whom God has blessed for that.

"On the contrary, I've seen letters, alas! Some write in a lofty, stilted style, as if to say, 'I know something about that,' which is simply vanity; others use an affected style unworthy of a Priest of the Mission who professes simplicity; others write about worldly affairs, make malicious remarks, or even hint at the faults of others, and that's slander. Oh, how diabolical that is! So then, let the Company refrain from this until it has God's blessing on it. If anyone feels moved to write about virtuous practices, the good results of missions, and the blessings God is giving to these, I encourage each one to do so. That was the practice of the early Church, which had constituted Protonotaries to write down the heroic acts of the martyrs, which the Bishops would send everywhere. People would read them, and that would set the hearts of Christians on fire, uniting them in a wonderful manner. May God be pleased to grant the Company that grace! Let's ask Him for it, Messieurs.

"I had a few other means to suggest to you, but that will be for the first opportune time. The Jesuits have the custom of writing to their General from wherever they are to inform him of anything that may be helpful to the Company, and the General chooses what he finds best and sends it to all the provinces. May those who feel inclined to write act like that, but let it be about matters of piety."

That, Monsieur, is roughly what our good Father had to say to us, or rather, the words of God, who spoke by his mouth. Now it's up to us to make good use of it, especially of that holy challenge filled with charity. I have no doubt that you are advancing more and more in this holy practice. As for me, I want to adopt it, with the grace of God.

96. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

July 20, 1642

At Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent recommended that we perform our actions silently, noiselessly, and without any commotion or agitation and gave several reasons for this: (1) *Te decet [silentium], Deus, in Sion*,² that silence was pleasing to God; and (2) because of the scandal given by not observing it. He added that he had been informed by a devout person that we were closing doors too loudly. If we were washing the dishes, it should be done silently, without making any noise. He knew of a house, far from being one like ours, in which there were 200 people; nevertheless, each person was in the habit of speaking softly because the master had indicated that he willed it. He [M. Vincent] asked the Company to be attentive to this for a month and wanted it to be the first fault of which anyone would accuse himself at Chapter.

The same day, he recommended that we not use, in the toilets, any paper on which the Holy Name of God or of the Blessed Virgin is written (1) because that holy name should be held in great reverence and veneration; and (2) because, since it is forbidden to take the Holy Name of God in vain, we must therefore not use it in a disrespectful manner. It is said to the sinner, *Quare tu assumis testamentum meum per os tuum*?³ He recommended that the Officers see to this.

Conference 96. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 15, Repetition of Prayer.

¹Subheading: Silence; Respect for the Holy Names of God and of the Blessed Virgin.

²Text of the manuscript has *Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion*. Cf. Ps 65:2. (NAB): *To you we owe our hymn of praise, O God, in Zion*. These words in no way signify that silence pleases God; we prefer to believe that Saint Vincent expressed himself at this Repetition of Prayer much like he would do at that of August 1, 1655 (cf. Conf. 128).

³*Why do you profess my covenant with your mouth?* Cf. Ps 50:16. (NAB)

97. - WELCOMING RETURNING MISSIONERS

September 5, 1642

M. Vincent recommended that we give a very warm reception to the men returning from the country and said that they should be welcomed as persons who have just driven out the devil, made Jesus Christ reign, and caused the name of God to triumph. If people are accustomed to give a triumphant welcome to those who have won some battle, why not do this for those who have just battled with the devil? He said that's why, when one of the men from here comes back home, the porter should ring the bell five or six times to summon the Procurator and the person in charge of the retreatants to come immediately. At the sound of the bell, they must leave everything, except the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

97a. - A CONVERSATION BETWEEN RICHELIEU¹ AND M. VINCENT

[Between 1638 and 1642]

"One day I was commissioned to ask Cardinal Richelieu to come to the aid of poor Ireland; this was during the time that England was at war with its King.² After I had done this, he said to me, 'Ha,

Conference 97. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 16.

Conference 97a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XXXV, p. 170.

¹Armand du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu, was born in Paris on September 9, 1585, the youngest of five children of François du Plessis and Suzanne de la Porte. As Bishop of Luçon he acted as spokesman for the clergy at the Estates-General of 1614. Raised to the cardinalate in 1622, he entered the King's Council (1624) and quickly became its head. His guidance of foreign affairs helped to raise France to the highest echelon among European powers. In the administration of French internal affairs, Richelieu imposed useful reforms in finances, the army, and legislation (Code Michau). He was the author of royal absolutism, destroying the privileges of the Huguenots and of the Provinces and reestablishing the authority of the Intendants throughout France. Richelieu died on December 4, 1642, attended by—among others—the Duchesse d'Aiguillon his niece, and King Louis XIII, who followed the Cardinal's deathbed advice in appointing Mazarin as Prime Minister.

²England was in the throes of a civil war, Parliament battling the King, Charles I, within the context of religious rebellions. Of the Irish who had fled to France, some entered the Congregation of the Mission and were among those who returned to Ireland to catechize and preach.

M. Vincent! The King is too busy to be able to do that.' I told him that the Pope would support it and was offering 100,000 écu. 'For an army,' he replied, '100,000 écu is nothing; you need so many soldiers, so much equipment, so many weapons, and so many convoys everywhere. An army is a huge machine that's not easily moved.' "

98. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

October 1643

The day we began our studies, M. Vincent took the opportunity at Repetition of Prayer to recommend the students to the prayers of the Company, stating that, if he had ever earnestly recommended anything, it was this, and he gave a few reasons, saying that (1) although all priests are obliged to be knowledgeable, yet we are especially obliged to be so because of the ministries and exercises to which the Providence of God has called us, such as our work with the ordinands, the direction of ecclesiastical seminaries, and missions, particularly since experience teaches that those who speak the most simply and in the language of the people are the most successful. "And, in fact, my dear confreres," he added, "have we ever seen that those who pride themselves on preaching well have had much success? Knowledge, however, is necessary." And he went on to say that those who were both learned and humble were the treasure of the Company, just as good, devout theologians were the treasure of the Church.

He brought forward, tactfully and affectionately, another reason why he was recommending this: "because studying is the most dangerous state, not only for individual students, but even for the General of the Company, which is very concerned that individuals pursue their studies properly in order to become capable of the ministries in which it places them. Now, since we naturally desire to

Conference 98. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 19.

¹Subheading: Recommendations for those who pursue studies.

know new things, if we don't take the edge off this desire and curiosity, there won't be a single page of reading that may not feed our vanity; beginning with the spirit, we'll end up with the flesh, desiring to look good, feeding on pipe dreams, wanting to have the upper hand over others, to be considered discerning, sensible, and as having good judgment—and you know where that can lead! O my dear confreres, let's be very careful lest this spirit slip into the Company! That's how the devil descended into hell."

Here he gave us the example of one of the most flourishing Communities in the Church of God, which was destroyed in less than six years because this spirit of wanting to learn and of piling knowledge upon knowledge slipped into it and caused unparalleled disorder.

Then he added a few means of pursuing our studies properly:

(1) To study in moderation, wanting only to know things that are suitable for us according to our state in life;

(2) To study humbly, that is, not to desire that people know or say that we're learned; not trying to come out on top but yielding to everyone. "O Messieurs," he said, "who will give us this humility, which will sustain us! How hard it is to find a man who is really knowledgeable and truly humble! Nevertheless, they're not incompatible. I knew a holy man, a good Jesuit named . . . , who was very learned; and with all his knowledge he was so humble that I don't recall ever having met a person as humble as he was. We've also known good M. Duval, who was a fine theologian, very learned and, with all that, so humble and simple that he couldn't be more so.

(3) We have to study in such a way that love corresponds to knowledge, especially for those studying theology, and do it in the manner of Cardinal de Bérulle, who, as soon as he had grasped a truth, gave himself to God either to practice a certain thing, to enter into certain sentiments, or to produce acts; and by this means, he acquired a holiness and learning so solid that anything similar could scarcely be found."

Finally, he concluded as follows: "Education is necessary, my dear confreres, and woe betide those who don't use their time well! But, let's fear, let's fear, dear brothers, let's fear, and, if I daresay,

let's tremble, and let's tremble a thousand times more than I could say; for those who are intelligent have a lot to fear: *scientia inflat*,² and it's worse for those who are not, if they don't humble themselves!"

99. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

October 21, 1643

Concerning the meditation on poor Lazarus and the wicked rich man, one of our confreres ended his meditation by an act of penance. That gave him [M. Vincent] the opportunity to speak. He said that, the day before, the members of the Conference² had discussed a question regarding penance. What had given rise to that topic was the thinking of a certain notable person, who said that priests didn't have to do penance but only the people; that they (priests) had to devote themselves to study and the Holy Sacrifice and to perfect themselves in that, enlightening the people and striving to animate them, through preaching and otherwise, to love God. Still, such beneficial things were said in the conference to prove that the clergy must enter into the spirit and acts of penance, that M. Vincent stated that he had never been so moved, and he told us the following that was said there:

"(1) One reason that can be concluded is that it's an act of vengeance, as Saint Augustine calls it, which we perform to satisfy the justice of God for sins and to make reparation, as far as in us lies, for the wrong that's been done Him. So then, it's an act of justice that we do. Now, what greater and more efficacious means than this is there to reconcile us with God? Furthermore, priests are not without sins,

²*Knowledge inflates*. Cf. 1 Cor 8:1. (NAB)

Conference 99. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 20, Repetition of Prayer.

¹*Subheading*: Necessity of doing penance to expiate sins and imitate Our Lord; examples of a Daughter of Charity and of Mlle du Fay; the good fortune of the Company to have in it only men of lowly social condition and little knowledge.

²The Tuesday Conferences for the clergy.

which are even greater and worse in the sight of God than those of the laity, and are perhaps the cause of the punishments God sends the poor people.

“(2) Since Our Lord was the perfect model of the priesthood, He showed us a constant example of penance, although He was innocent—and innocence itself—constantly making satisfaction for the sins of the people. O Messieurs! O you priests! Let’s tremble and blush at the strict penances which Canon Law itself imposes on priests! Let’s not flatter ourselves, Messieurs, let’s not flatter ourselves; we need penance, we lack penance. *O mon Dieu!* Who will give us the spirit of penance? Messieurs, what this good Brother has said is very true: a single one of our sins merits a severe penance. *Eh quoi!* Isn’t it a great mercy of God to welcome us back into His grace after we had rebelled against Him?”

Next, he spoke about a Sister of Charity who had recently died, telling us a little of what was said at the conference on her virtues. “Among other things, it was noted that she always showed a strong spirit of penance. (1) She was one of the first—and even the first—at prayers. (2) She never lost an opportunity to pray, whenever she had a few free moments. She was even found praying with her bare knees on a pointed stone. (3) She had a very special devotion to hearing Holy Mass, so that she never lost a chance to hear one, even though she may have heard one or two. (4) She usually did the most painful and despicable thing that had to be done, like leading the horse through the parishes. She did this very zealously and, when she happened to be splashed and drenched with water, she’d say, ‘*Eh quoi!* Don’t we have to put up with something for love of God?’ These were words she always had on her lips in similar circumstances. Do you see what sanctity that is, my dear confreres? Look at the treasure, the pearls in the mud, in the mud, for she was a poor widow, unattractive in body and mind; yet, you see that what seems foolish and contemptible in the eyes of human beings is wisdom in the sight of God! On the contrary, what seems brilliant, lofty wisdom in the eyes of human beings is only folly in the sight of God—folly, folly, folly in the sight of God! Just look at David, a little shepherd boy, and Saint Gregory of Tours, who was very deformed—a little dwarf; so much so

that, when his reputation brought him before His Holiness, the latter felt a certain repulsion as he approached, but when the saint said these beautiful words to him, *ipse fecit nos et non ipsi nos*,³ he conceived a higher opinion of him and welcomed him with a warm embrace.

"We've seen good Mlle du Fay,⁴ the sister of M. de Vincy—who, by an accident of nature, had one thigh two or three times larger than the other—so united to God that I don't know if I've ever seen a soul as closely united to God as she was. She used to call her thigh her 'blessed thigh'; for it had kept her from society and even from marriage, in which she might perhaps have been lost.

"Now, my dear confreres, let's look upon such imperfections, be they of body or mind, as a special mercy of God, and always have a particular reverence for those who have such defects, always considering them as the brush strokes of a great master, even though the work may not be finished. Those who understand painting well put a higher value on the brush stroke of an excellent artist than on a completed picture done by a mediocre painter. *In nomine Domini!*

"I think I told you before what the General of the Oratory⁵ told me about the Company. Among other things he said, 'O M. Vincent! How fortunate you are that your Company has the marks of

³He, and not we ourselves, made us. Cf. Ps 100:3. (NAB)

⁴Isabelle du Fay was a woman of eminent piety, entirely devoted to Saint Vincent, whom she assisted with her wealth. If a troublesome infirmity had not prevented her, she would have taken a much more active role in the saint's works. Her paternal uncle, René Hennequin, had married Marie de Marillac, Saint Louise's aunt. Mlle du Fay's brother, the priest Antoine Hennequin, Sieur de Vincy, was a great friend of Saint Vincent. He died in 1645, four hours after being received into the Congregation of the Mission.

⁵Charles de Condren, born in Vauxbuin, near Soissons, on December 16, 1588, entered the Oratory on June 17, 1617, after receiving his doctorate at the Sorbonne. He founded the seminary of Langres in 1619 and that of Saint-Magloire in 1620; then he established a house of his Congregation in Poitiers, where he remained for over a year. On his return to Paris, he made a fine reputation for himself as a director of souls, which attracted to him Olier, Meyster, Amelote, the King's brother Gaston the Duc d'Orléans, and other eminent persons of rank. He governed the Oratory from October 30, 1629, to January 7, 1641, the day of his death. Saint Vincent held him in high esteem. "He spoke to me about him in terms that might seem unbelievable," wrote Jean-Jacques Olier (cf. *Mémoires autographes*, II, p. 225), "and I remember that he said to me concerning him, 'There has not been found a man like him'; and a thousand other similar things, going even so far as to fall on his knees and strike his breast when he learned of his death, and to accuse himself, with tears in his eyes, of not having honored the holy man as much as he deserved."

the institution of Jesus Christ! For, in instituting the Church, He took pleasure in choosing poor persons, idiots, and sinners to found it and to implant it throughout the world with instruments so chosen in order to make His own power more manifest. He overturned the wisdom of the philosophers through poor fishermen, and the power of Kings and Emperors through the weakness of those who, when they were insulted, humbled themselves and prayed for those who cursed them, and, if someone struck them, they made themselves the victors by turning the other cheek. In like manner, most and almost all those whom God calls into your Company are either poor, of a low social class, or not very brilliant in knowledge.' *Eh, bien!* Nevertheless, brothers, the whole kingdom is afire and filled with the spirit of this Little Company; and the esteem in which it is held has reached the point that, shortly before the death of the late King, he did me the honor of telling me that, if he recovered his health, he wouldn't allow any Bishop to be appointed until he had spent three years with the Mission. What do you think of that, brothers? *In nomine Domini, in nomine Domini!*

"Recently, brothers, I was telling you that the acquisition of knowledge was necessary for you, and I say it again. For the love of God, use this time well, but don't neglect virtue."

100. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

October 25, 1643

The subject of today's meditation was rendering to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. Regarding justice, M. Vincent spoke about the missions that were about to open, and he humbled himself greatly because, although it was customary to open them early in October in preceding years, this year we had

Conference 100. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 23, Repetition of Prayer.

¹Subheading: Zeal for the missions.

begun them later. He said this with a deep sentiment of fear of God's judgment; after which he said many beautiful things to encourage the Missioners in their work, and he began with our obligation to work for the salvation of the poor country people because that's our vocation, and to correspond to God's eternal plans for us: "Now, to work for the salvation of poor country people is the main purpose of our vocation, and all the rest is only accessory to it; for we would never have worked in ministry for the ordinands and in seminaries for the clergy if we hadn't judged that this was necessary to maintain the people and preserve the fruits of missions given by good priests. In that we imitate the great conquerors, who leave garrisons in the places they capture for fear of losing what they have acquired with so much difficulty. Aren't we very blessed, my dear confreres, to live authentically the vocation of Jesus Christ? For who lives better the way of life Jesus lived on earth than missionaries? I'm not just talking about us, but missionaries from the Oratory, from Christian Doctrine, Capuchin missionaries, Jesuit missionaries. O brothers, those are the great missionaries, and we're only shadows of them. Look at how they go even as far as the Indies, Japan, and Canada to complete the work Jesus Christ began on earth and never abandoned from the first instant of His call! *Hic est Filius meus dilectus, ipsum audite*.² From the time His Father commanded this, He didn't stop for a single moment until His death. Let's try to imagine that He's saying to us, 'Set out, you Missioners, set out! *Quoi!* You're still here, and there are poor souls waiting for you, whose salvation depends perhaps on your preaching and catechizing!'

"We have to ponder this well, for God has destined us at a particular time for certain souls and not for others. We see this even in Scripture, where we read that God destined His prophets for certain persons and didn't want them to go to others. *Quoi*, brothers! What answer will we give to God if, through our fault, some one of these souls should happen to die and be lost? Wouldn't we be the ones, so to speak, who damned it? For, I ask you, who would answer for that

²*This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.* Cf. Mt 17:5. (NAB)

soul? It's as true as that we are here that, at the time of our death, God would ask us to give an account of this.

“On the other hand, if we correspond to the obligations of our ministry, what will happen? God will increase, day by day, the graces of vocation, will give the Company members the right spirit to act with the Spirit of God, and will bless all that's done within the Company and outside of it. Lastly, those souls who will be saved through our ministry will testify before God of our fidelity and will bless the little band of Missioners who are in heaven: M. de la Salle, M. de Sergis,³ and all the others—along with our good Brother Desfriches,⁴ who died recently—and who form the little band of Missioners in heaven. *In nomine Domini!*

“How happy will those be who, at the hour of death, can say these beautiful words of Our Lord, *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus!*⁵ You see, brothers, that the essential aim of Our Lord was to work for poor persons. When He went to others, it was only in passing. But woe to us also if we become lax in carrying out the obligations we have to help poor souls! For we have given ourselves to God for that purpose and God is counting on us. *Declinantes ab obligatione adducet Dominus cum operantibus iniquitatem.*⁶ *Quos non pavisti occidisti.*⁷ This passage refers to temporal nourishment, but it can be applied just as truly to food for the soul. Imagine, brothers, what reason we have to tremble if we're stay-at-home people or, if, because of our age or under pretext of some infirmity, we slow down and let our fervor diminish!

“But perhaps someone will say, ‘Suppose I'm busy with ordination retreats or with the seminarians?’ That's good when God is pleased to use us for that and obedience sends us; in that case, fine!

³Robert de Sergis was born on March 2, 1608, in Auvers, near Pontoise. He was received into the Congregation of the Mission in June 1628, was ordained a priest in April 1632, and died in December 1640 or January 1641.

⁴François Desfriches was born in Melun in 1620 and entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on June 29, 1642.

⁵*The Lord sent me to bring the good news to the poor.* Cf. Lk 4:18. (NAB)

⁶*The Lord will bring to iniquity with their works those turning away from duty.* Cf. Ps 125:5. (NAB)

⁷*Those you did not feed, you killed.*

Here again, however, we'd be in a terrible state, so to speak, especially since, as I told you, those things are only accessory to our principal aim.

“(2) Someone may also make excuses for himself because of his age. As for me, despite my age, before God I don't feel excused from the obligation I have to work for the salvation of those poor people; for what could prevent me from doing so? If I couldn't preach every day, *eh bien*, I'd do it twice a week! If I couldn't give long sermons, I'd try to give short ones; if, again, people didn't understand me at those short ones, what would prevent me from speaking plainly and simply to those good people in the way I'm speaking to you right now, gathering them around me, as you are?

“O brothers, I know some elderly men who, on Judgment Day will rise up against us, among others a holy man, a good Jesuit Father, who had preached at the Court for almost ten years. When he was almost sixty, he had an illness that brought him to the brink of death, and as God made him see the vanity of his lofty discourses and fanfare—which may delight people but aren't very beneficial—and as He gave him remorse of conscience for that, once his health was restored he asked permission to go to catechize and preach familiarly to those good peasants, and he did it for twenty years until his death. Before dying, he asked that someone do him one favor after his death, namely, to bury with him the drumstick he had used to summon the children to have them give the answers to the catechism, as is customary with those peasants. He desired this, he said, so that this drumstick might serve as a testimony of how he had left the Court to follow Our Lord in the country.

“(3) Someone might also claim that he'd be shortening his life. O brothers! *Eh quoi!* Is it a misfortune for an exiled spouse to be reunited with her husband? Is it a misfortune for a traveler to return to his native land? Is it a misfortune for those who sail the seas to come into port? *Quoi!* Are we afraid that something we can't desire enough, and which happens only too late, may occur?”

Finally, addressing our good Brothers, M. Vincent concluded as follows: “What I say to the priests, I'm addressing just as much to each one of you, Brothers. Don't think you're exempt from the obli-

gation of working for the salvation of poor persons, for you can do it in your own way, as well, perhaps, as the preachers themselves, and less dangerously for you. Furthermore, you're obliged to do so. The same obligation Our Lord's head had to wear the Crown of Thorns to redeem us, the same His feet had to bear and suffer the nails with which they were attached to the Cross; and, in the same way that the head was rewarded, the feet were, too, and together they shared equally the glory."

101. - RESPONSIBILITIES AND POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY

1644

M. Vincent concluded this conference in nearly these terms: "I don't know how I should speak to you on this topic because it regards me." Then, pausing a little and humbling himself interiorly before God, he added, "Nevertheless, I'm going to tell you my little thoughts. What touched me the most in what was said today and last Friday is what has been told about Our Lord, who was the natural Master of everyone and yet made himself the least of all, the disgrace and abjection of men, always taking the last place wherever he went. Perhaps, my dear confreres, you think that a man is truly humble and has really abased himself when he has taken the last place. *Eh quoi!* Does a man humble himself when he takes the place of Our Lord? Yes, brothers, the place of Our Lord is the last place. The man who wants to be in charge can't have the spirit of Our Lord; that Divine Savior didn't come into the world to be served but rather to serve others; He practiced this magnificently, not only during the time He stayed with His parents and with the persons He was serving in order to earn His living, but even, as several holy Fathers have felt, during the time His Apostles were staying with Him, by serving them with His own hands, washing their feet, and getting them to rest from their labors.

“Lastly, He rebuked His Apostles, who were arguing among themselves about who would be the first, saying to them, ‘You see, the one who wants to be first must make himself the last and the servant of all the others.’¹ Take careful note, brothers, that it’s the cursed spirit of pride that takes hold of those who want to be raised up and be in charge of others. There’s no better way for me to describe this deplorable state than to say that those persons have a devil in their body; for the devil is the father of the pride that has hold of them. *O mon Dieu!* When a despicable person has reached that point, what a wretched state he’s in and how worthy he is of compassion. . . ! Do you see, brothers, that there’s another difficulty in maintaining ourselves in the same state of virtue in which we were before taking charge, unless we work constantly to empty ourselves of self before God and mortify ourselves in all things? Otherwise, how can the cares and crush of business not distract us from loving God and from uniting ourselves to God through prayer and recollection! Alas, there’s almost no time left to think of Him! Today I was saying to a Superior who was talking to me about some men to whom he was planning to entrust some responsibilities, ‘Alas, you’re going to lose them! They are souls closely united to God, and failing to work at their perfection is to lose everything.’ *Mais quoi!* It’s a necessary evil. What is much worse, however, is what I heard from one of the holiest men I’ve ever known (it was Cardinal de Bérulle), and what I experienced a long time ago, and it happens this way in almost every case, namely, that this state of leadership and being in charge is so evil that of itself and its nature it leaves a malignancy, a vile, cursed stain; yes, brothers, a malignancy that infects a man’s soul and all his faculties, with the result that, once out of office, he has all the trouble in the world submitting his judgment and finds fault with everything. What a pity! How rebellious he feels when he has to obey! In short, his words, his gestures, his gait, and his bearing always retain a trace of his self-importance, unless he’s one of those men filled with God; but, believe me, brothers, there are few like that; positions of authority generally put an end to that.

¹Cf. Mt 20:26-27. (NAB)

“Next, there’s the exact account God demands of those who are responsible for others, be it only of a Brother he may have as a companion in his ministry. Oh, wretched man that I am! What will I answer to God, seeing that for so long a time. . . ! *Or sus*, may God be pleased to forgive me! We’ll have to give an account to God, brothers, of any words, actions, or attitudes that may have given bad example to those for whom we will have been responsible; whether we reminded them of their failings, when necessary, and in the spirit of gentleness, humility, and charity that we should have used, with proper regard to the circumstances: the first time, with great kindness and gentleness, taking our time; the second, a little more sternly and seriously, accompanied nevertheless by gentleness and loving requests and reproofs filled with kindness; the third, zealously and firmly, even pointing out to them what action we’ll be obliged to take. Speaking of this, the story is told that when Cardinal Bellarmine² was Archbishop of Capua, someone came to inform him that a Bishop in his diocese was seriously ill; he went to see him and was surprised to find him very tranquil and with great peace of mind, which made him suspect that there was surely some illusion of the devil there. *Dicentes: pax, pax, et non erat pax.*³ He decided to enlighten that Bishop by saying to him, ‘How is it, Monsieur, that you’re enjoying such great peace, so extraordinary for persons in our position on such an occasion? Have you really reflected, Monsieur, and given much thought to the words of the Apostle, *Argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia et doctrina*?⁴ Is it really possible that you don’t find yourself guilty before God on this point of such great importance? If not, Monsieur, don’t be deceived, for you’re undoubtedly under some illusion.’ That touched the Bishop; and bursting into tears, he excited himself to contrition, or rather became so upset that the Archbishop had to go to see him a second time and restored his peace of mind by another means. *O mon Dieu*, what man will not

²Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, S. J. (1542-1621). Saint Louise de Marillac had great respect for his famous catechetical manuals.

³*Saying, peace, peace, and there was no peace.* Cf. Jer 6:14. (NAB)

⁴*Correct, entreat, reprove, and teach in all patience.* Cf. 2 Tim 4:2. (NAB)

tremble at that fearful moment, especially if he did anything to be put in a position of authority!

“Recently I asked a Bishop if, when he was climbing up the mountains, en route to his diocese, he didn’t have some thoughts about the weight of his responsibility. ‘Alas, Monsieur! I didn’t wait until then, for, three weeks after I was consecrated, I felt such poignant remorse that I was repenting of what I was and would have willingly begun over again.’ Doubtless, most of those who are raised to high offices find themselves sooner or later in that situation; but what will we do to banish entirely from the Company that cursed, diabolical spirit of aspiring to posts of responsibility?

“(1) Let me tell you that, if there’s anyone among us who’s not deeply moved—yes, deeply—with regret for having aspired to important ministries, and may not yet be disposed to abhor this craving and this cursed attraction for posts of responsibility and privileges, he’s in a very sad state and worthy of compassion. He mustn’t stop punishing himself with a hair shirt, the discipline, and other mortifications, until God has mercy on him, and he must go before the Blessed Sacrament and complain to God, ‘Ah, my God! What have I done? In truth, I’m filled with sin, but why do you allow me to stray so far from you, my God, through a cursed, diabolical spirit? My God, have mercy on me!’

“(2) My wish, brothers, would be that the entire Company might thank God for the grace He has granted it of not allowing this spirit of being in command and of superiority to take hold of those who are in charge; on the contrary, all the Superiors of the houses of this Little Company write to me from everywhere (I only know of one, just recently settled, who doesn’t), generally all the others don’t let six months go by without writing to ask me insistently to remove them from office. Lastly, when the Superior in Rome⁵ was relieved

⁵Bernard Codoing, who holds an important place among the early companions of Saint Vincent, was born in Agen on August 11, 1610, was ordained a priest in December 1635, and entered the Congregation of the Mission on February 10, 1636. He was the first Superior of the Annecy Seminary (1640-42) and then Superior of the house in Rome (1642-44). He was next put in charge of Saint-Charles Seminary (1645-46), situated on the grounds of Saint-Lazare. From there he went to Saint-Méen under particularly difficult circumstances (1646-48), La Rose (1649), Richelieu (1649), and Périgueux (1650), always as Superior. He was very successful in

of office, he wrote me so joyfully and with such profuse thanks that you can't imagine it. I'd be very happy to read his letter to the Company; but, to my great regret, I forgot to bring it. O brothers, how many blessings the Company will receive as long as God will be pleased to preserve in it this spirit, which is the spirit of humility, the spirit of Our Lord! We must thank God for this; I ask our Brothers to remember it at Communion, and the priests at Holy Mass, and it would be a very good idea to celebrate Mass for that purpose. How many prayers, how many Masses certain Superiors of the Company have said so that God might be pleased to allow them to be relieved of their office! *In nomine Domini!*

“When obedience designates us for a leadership position, well and good, we must submit; that's what the Bishop of Geneva⁶ ordained, namely, that, when a Sister is elected to some office, even though she thinks she's unworthy of it, she submits, nevertheless, and goes to the grille to receive the blessing and to hope for the necessary graces from God to carry out her office. For, when God calls us to it, brothers, either He sees in us the proper dispositions or has determined to give them to us.”

his missions in France and Italy, and his sermons were so appealing that at one point Saint Vincent considered publishing them; in 1651, however, shortly after coming to Périgueux, he left the Congregation of the Mission.

Codoing was Pastor of Saint-Hilaire in Agen on July 24, 1654; the last date with his signature on the baptismal register there is January 2, 1678. He also acted as Vicar-General of the Bishop of Gap (cf. *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, vol. 114-15 [1949-50]). Codoing would have rendered greater service to the saint had he been less attached to his own ideas and learned to control his tendency to hastiness. We might be tempted to say “Happy faults!” since they merited for us some of the most beautiful letters in Saint Vincent's correspondence.

⁶Saint Francis de Sales.

102. - EXHORTATION TO A DYING BROTHER

1645

“Well, my good Brother, how are you doing at present? So you think it’s very right that Our Lord our Great General, the first of all the Missioners, wants to have you in the mission of heaven. You see, He wants all of us, each in turn, to go there, and that’s one of the principal rules and constitutions He established on earth: *Volo ut ubi ego sum, illic sit et minister meus.*¹ *Vos estis qui permansistis mecum*, etc.² *Mon Dieu!* What consolation you must have to be chosen from among the first to go on mission—but to that eternal mission where all the exercises are to love God! Isn’t it true that our Great Superior will want to grant you this grace of being one of those blessed Missioners? You must doubtlessly be hoping firmly for this from His Goodness, and with this confidence, saying to him humbly, ‘O my Lord, how is it that I have this happiness? Alas! It isn’t because I’ve merited it; no, for what proportion is there between the work of the missions that are given here below and the joy and eternal reward of the Missioners who are with You? So then, my good Master, I’m hoping for it from Your goodness and generosity alone. And even though, in addition to the inequality there is between the work of the missions here below and the joy and reward You give them on high, I’ve committed many sins and acts of cowardice and infidelity that make me unworthy of them; nevertheless, I hope from Your goodness and infinite generosity that You’ll forgive me this immense debt, as You did for the poor debtor in the Gospel, *Et omne debitum dimisi ei*,³ because Your mercy and good-

Conference 102. - Archives of the Mission, Paris, seventeenth- or eighteenth-century copy.

Coste observed how strange it seems that Saint Vincent, speaking to a dying Brother who did not understand Latin, would have made numerous scriptural references in this language. May not the one who reported the saint’s words have substituted the Latin text for the French translation used by the saint? Dodin offered this comment: “The use of Latin may be explained if we presume that the Brother was a clerical student” (cf. *Entretiens spirituels*, p. 83)

¹*I will that where I am, my servant may also be.* Cf. Jn 12:26. (NAB)

²*You are the ones who have stood by me*, etc. Cf. Lk 22:28. (NAB)

³*And he forgave his entire debt.* Cf. Mt 18:32. (NAB)

ness are infinitely greater than my unworthiness and malice.’ As for past acts of negligence, alas, what more efficacious remedy could we apply at present than the chagrin of having committed them, striving, after that, to glorify God and to honor Him as best we can in the little time remaining to us. Now, it’s certain that one of the greatest honors and the greatest glory you’re capable of rendering Him right now is to hope with your whole heart in His goodness and infinite merits, despite this necessary unworthiness and those infidelities committed in the past; for the throne of His mercy is the greatness of the faults to be forgiven. This is the confidence He expects of you in order to oblige Him by it to tell you with the affection of a father, which He has had for you from all eternity, *Hodie mecum eris in paradiso; hodie mecum eris in paradiso*.⁴ Be consoled and rejoice at the same time in this thought and in filial confidence in what He says to you from on high in these same words, *Hodie mecum eris*, and render Him this glory right now, dear brother; it’s a beautiful opportunity to do so.

“Now is truly the time to make many ardent acts of love for our dear Master; and those beautiful acts of hope, so pleasing to His Divine Majesty that you’ve just made should help you on your way; for, if He is as magnificent, as liberal, and as good as you hope, isn’t it true that you have good reason to burst forth and say, ‘O God of my heart, Your infinite goodness doesn’t allow me to share my affections or to give them to anyone else if that’s prejudicial to You! Take possession, for yourself alone, of my heart and my liberty! And how could I wish for anything good from anyone else but You! Would it be, perhaps, from myself? Alas! You love me infinitely more than I love myself; You are infinitely more desirous of my welfare and have the power to see to it better than I myself, who have nothing and hope for nothing except from You. O my only Good! O Infinite Good! Would that I had as much love for you than all the Seraphim put together! Alas! It’s too late to be able to imitate them! *O antiqua bonitas, sero te amavi!*’⁵ But, at least I offer You,

⁴*This day you will be with me in paradise; this day you will be with me in paradise.* Cf. Lk 23:43. (NAB)

⁵*O goodness so ancient, late have I loved you!* Cf. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, bk. 10, 27.

with all the extent of my affections, the love of the Most Holy Queen of Angels and of all the blessed in general. O my God, before heaven and earth I give You my heart, such as it is. I adore, for love of You, the decrees of Your paternal Providence regarding Your poor servant; in the presence of the whole heavenly court, I despise anything that could separate me from You. O Sovereign Goodness, You who want to be loved by sinners, give me love for You, and then command what You will: *da quod jubes et jube quod vis.*'

"Yes, my very dear Brother, it's true, and you must not doubt in any way that God's good pleasure has always been that you love Him, but especially right now; this is so that we may love Him who has made us in His own image and likeness, in view of the fact that we love only what is like ourselves—if not completely, at least in something. When this great God created us with the plan to require of us that pleasant duty of loving Him and this honorable tribute, He willed to place in us the seed of love, which is our resemblance to Him, so that we may not excuse ourselves, saying that we don't have the means to pay it. This lover of our hearts, seeing that sin had unfortunately spoiled and obliterated this resemblance, willed to break all the laws of nature in order to repair this damage, but with such a marvelous benefit that He wasn't content with placing in us the resemblance and mark of His divinity, but even willed, by the same plan that we should love Him, to make himself like us and clothe himself with our very humanity. And who, then, would be willing to refuse such a just and salutary duty?

"Furthermore, since love is inventive to infinity, after being affixed to the infamous stake of the cross to win the hearts and souls of those by whom He wishes to be loved—not to mention all the other innumerable schemes He used for this purpose during His time spent among us—foreseeing that His absence could cause some forgetfulness or cooling off in our hearts, He wanted to avoid this danger by instituting the Most August Sacrament, in which He is as truly and substantially present as He is in heaven above. Furthermore, however, seeing that, if He wanted to humble and empty himself even more than He had done in His Incarnation and could make himself in some way more like us—or at least make us more like

Him—He caused this venerable Sacrament to serve us as food and drink, intending by this means that the same union and resemblance that exist between nature and substance should occur spiritually in each human person. Because love can do and will everything, He willed it thus; and for fear that, if people didn't understand this incredible mystery and scheme of love, they might neglect to approach this Sacrament, He has obliged them to do so under pain of incurring His eternal displeasure. *Nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis, non habebitis vitam.*⁶

"From this you see how, by every means imaginable, He has striven to win us over to love Him and, with this in view, you must stir up your heart to pay this just and pleasant tribute to love of a God who has been the object of all His plans for you and for which to obtain it He did all that He has done for you. You must believe that the greatest present you could offer Him is your heart; He asks nothing else of you: *Fili, praebe mihi cor tuum.*⁷

"If your thoughts are telling you that it's rashness for a poor debtor and insignificant slave to aspire to the affection and embraces of the Spouse, tell them that God is the one who is ordering you to do this, and who desires it. If the difficulty you experienced in formulating some act of faith, for example, were to cause you some pain and scruple, have recourse to acts of love, which, notwithstanding the greatest ease in producing them, will be more meritorious for you, for they'll please God more, and, in addition, will lock in even more the acts of those other interior virtues. If you've had any trouble forming acts of contrition, look at them from the angle of love, especially since they're nothing other than that.

"Aren't you content that God's Will is being fulfilled in you? Don't you want Him to be infinitely pleased with you? Don't you want Him to receive all the glory He expects from the sufferings He allows you to experience at present? If it were up to you to procure for Him the glory He expects from all creatures, wouldn't you be glad to do it? But aren't you happy with all the glory and perfection God has

⁶*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, you will not have life.* Cf. Jn 6:53. (NAB)

⁷*Son, give me your heart.* Cf. Prv 23:26. (NAB)

in himself? Don't you detest wholeheartedly everything that's contrary to the satisfaction and good pleasure of God? Wouldn't you wish to have loved Him all your life like the Blessed Virgin did?

“*Eh bien!* Reflect often on those beautiful acts His Divine Majesty desires of you, and believe that they are the lighted lamps of those wise virgins who were admitted, because of them, to the eternal wedding feast with the Spouse. What a beautiful disposition for going in with Him!

“Aren't you most willing to leave us with the hope that you won't forget us when you're in heaven with the little band of Missioners who are already there? Do us the favor of showing them the confidence we have in their holy prayers, so that they may obtain for us from our Great General the grace to carry out our mission so well here below that we may say with humble confidence, at the hour of our death, *Feci quod jussisti, fac tu quod promisisti* ⁸; that is, to be still a part of the Mission of heaven, which is a Mission of love that will last forever.”

Then, as he was leaving, M. Vincent said to those who were remaining with the patient, “Sometimes you can speak to him and console him, comparing the sufferings of Our Lord with his; at another time mention how a certain saint conducted himself in similar circumstances; above all, encourage him strongly to have great trust in God.”

103. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

1645

During Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent said that temptation was a propitious state and that one day spent in that state earned more merit for us than a month without any temptation. “Come,

⁸*I have done what you ordered; do what you have promised.*

Conference 103, - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 30.

¹Subheading: Temptations.

temptations, come; you're welcome!" "But that's contrary to faith." "No matter! We mustn't ask God to free us of them, but to help us to use them well and to prevent us from giving in to them. That's a great benefit. One of the Apostles has said, *Omne gaudium existimate, fratres, cum in varias tentationes incideritis*.² On the contrary, it's a mark of reprobation to have everything to our liking. Witness this incident with Saint Ambrose that's so famous in history. When the saint arrived at the home of a very rich man and asked him if he had ever been discontented with anything, he said no, that good things came to him as he wished, and he had children who gave him only pleasure. 'Let's get out of here,' said Saint Ambrose, 'something isn't right.' When they had gone a distance, the cloud that had appeared over the house formed a thunderbolt, which, falling on that house, burned up the master and his children.

"(1) We must expect to be tempted, especially as we advance in virtue.

"(2) We mustn't be surprised to be tempted.

"(3) Accept being tempted.

"(4) Thank God for it.

"The first step is to expect to be tempted, to seek our satisfactions where there's something to combat. *Quare posuisti me contrarium mihi et factus sum mihi metipsi gravis?*³ asked Job. It's because we're composed of various parts. Here we should recall the story of a captain, who bought each soldier two pistols, then gave them ration bread; but after that, instead of feeding them delicately and making them craven cowards who would be useless to him, he put them in the section of the army where the fighting was heaviest. In the same way, God gives us a taste for things in the beginning, but then He sends hardships and the torment of temptations and trials. A person who knew something about the sea said that, when we see a large number of dolphins moving in order, cavorting in the sea, and a multitude of little birds attaching themselves to the mast, it gives us pleasure; but afterward, when water, bread, and victuals are lacking, all

²Brothers, count it as pure joy when you are involved in every sort of trial. Cf. Jas 1:2. (NAB)

³Why have you set me against you and I have become burdensome to myself? Cf. Jb 7:20. (DR-B)

that's left is trouble and fear. Because pond water is always still, it's stagnant, muddy, and smelly; but, on the contrary, the waters of rivers and fountains that flow rapidly among the stones and rocks are beautiful and gentle. Now, in that comparison, who would not prefer to be the river rather than the pond? And don't be surprised at being bored by the same things, given the fact that we're made in the same way."

104. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

When one of the men who was questioned excused himself for not having heard the subject of meditation well, M. Vincent said, "It's true, I've noticed that the reading is too soft. Brother, you who did the reading, you read too softly and a little quickly; please pay attention to this. If it's too soft, the reading is hard to hear; if it's too fast, it's hard to understand, for our mind doesn't catch on right away. Last week, I asked the reader to read more calmly to allow time for the truths to sink into our minds better and to facilitate reflection. When the reading is done hurriedly, we don't understand anything, everything goes by and nothing remains. That's why the Church orders the reading to be done without hurry. It has even made a special Office of it. God willed an Order for that; He established with His Blood a store of grace so that the lector may make himself clear to the people when he reads Sacred Scripture aloud, distinctly and unhurriedly. When someone reads in this way, you could say that each of his words strikes and moves the heart. Alas! Many people infringe on these rules; but we have to admit that many, however, are faithful to them, by the grace of God, and their reading touches the listeners and even myself, wretched man that I am. They seem to give to those who are listening the spirit with which they are animated. If their words bring grace, it's because

Conference 104. - Archives of the Mission, Paris, Italian translation. On the day Saint Vincent presided at this Repetition of Prayer, René Alméras was most likely Assistant at the motherhouse; this allows us to place it between 1642 and 1646, or between 1654 and 1660.

¹*Subheading:* Reading Aloud.

they apply themselves, listen to themselves, and are the first ones moved; by this means they succeed in inspiring others. God grant that we might have that spirit! Yes, God grant that it may be thus! Let's ask Him for this grace, and to obtain it, let's offer Him our reading in advance, asking Him to make it profitable, despite our sins, for the persons who are present and to touch them with His grace. I repeat that you must read clearly and unhurriedly so that nothing may be lost. We gather no fruit from a rapid reading; nothing of it remains.

"I ask the Company to adopt this practice, already followed by many others; in this way the Divine Word we announce will give glory to God and be helpful to souls."

Turning to M. Alméras, he said, "I think, Monsieur, that the priests are being deprived of this benefit; in the name of God, see to that; we should share it, just as in serving at table.

"The Company should be very watchful about reading at meals; the reading is done too quickly, as if there were some great hurry. I recognize, however, that for some time now it has been slower, and you're stopping at the end of sentences; but that's not enough; you have to read the sentence calmly, slowly, and without haste, then stop before beginning the next one. Otherwise, how could we understand? Our mind is like a little vase with a very narrow opening; when water is poured into it little by little in small trickles it goes in without loss and the vase fills up; but when we pour it quickly and abundantly, very little goes in—or, rather, nothing goes in. Likewise, when the reading is done calmly, the mind absorbs what it hears—which is impossible for it to do while listening to a rapid reading, for then it's always trying to catch up and can't pause anywhere; so there are no good results. I ask all those who will read to be careful about that from now on and, from time to time, to raise their hearts to God during the reading, asking Him to kindly engrave on the minds of the listeners what is being read, and to make it beneficial, especially for the reader."

M. Vincent added that there was a difference between reading slowly and reading in an unhurried way.

104a. - CHARITY AND UNION¹

[End of 1646]

“Be united among yourselves and God will bless you; but let it be through the charity of Jesus Christ, for any other union that’s not cemented by the Blood of this Divine Savior can’t subsist. So, it’s in Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ, and for Jesus Christ that you must be united with one another.

“The Spirit of Jesus Christ is a spirit of union and peace: how could you draw souls to Jesus Christ if you weren’t united among yourselves and with Him? That couldn’t be. So then, have only one same opinion and one same will, otherwise it would be to act like horses hitched to the same plow, with some pulling to one side, the others to the other, and in that way they’d spoil and break everything.

“God calls us to work in His vineyard; go to it as having in Him but one same heart and intention, and by this means you’ll have a very good yield of fruit from it.”

105. - MINISTRY WITH THE ORDINANDS

[1647 or 1648]

“For sixty-seven years¹ God has borne with me on this earth, but, after having thought and rethought several times about finding a means to acquire and maintain union and charity with God and the

Conference 104a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. VIII, pp. 145-46.

¹*Subheading:* Union alone allows us to subsist in Jesus Christ and to attract souls.

M. Vincent is speaking here to the Missioners leaving for Ireland: Jean Bourdet, Gerard Brin, Edme Barry, Francis White, and Dermot Duggan. Two seminarians, Philippe Le Vacher and, perhaps, Thady Lee, were their associates. Pierre Leclerc and Salomon Patriarche, coadjutor Brothers, accompanied them.

Conference 105. - Manuscript of Bro. Louis Robineau, excerpt.

¹Since Saint Vincent states here that he is sixty-seven years of age, there is no doubt that this instruction is from 1647 or early 1648.

neighbor, I've found no other nor any more suitable than holy humility; it's the first, second, third, fourth, and, in a word, the last. As for me, I know of none other: to put myself below everyone else, considering no one wicked and despicable but myself; for, you see, brothers, self-love blinds many people. Your brother reads well, but you hear poorly; he explains clearly, but you don't understand. As ferocious as the lion is, if he sees someone humbling himself before him and kneeling down, he'll do him no harm. As long as we maintain ourselves in the spirit of humility, we have good reason to hope that God will continue to entrust us with directing the ordinands; but, once we begin to act with them as master to disciple, without respect and humility, we can say farewell to that ministry; it will be passed on to others, and, instead of directing others, we won't even be able to direct ourselves. I know full well that some men have their reasons for acting with greater authority; but for the Mission, I neither think nor see that this is the spirit in which it should act, nor that it will bear much fruit from it. And if some of these ordinands should happen to commit some fault, the cause must be attributed to ourselves."

105a. - FREQUENT COMMUNION

[1648]

Another time, speaking to his Community on the same topic, he told them that they should ask God to be pleased to give them the desire to receive Holy Communion often, that there was good reason to groan before God and to be saddened by seeing this devotion grow cold among Christians, and that the new opinions¹ were partially the cause of this.

Conference 105a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VIII, sect. I, pp. 77-78. This conference does not appear in Coste.

¹Jansenist doctrine undermined the ideas of confession and frequent Communion, as pious persons were learning to their spiritual detriment

In this regard, when he was speaking with the Superior of a holy Company, and with someone else who was a great director of souls, and asked them if they saw many people coming to their confessionals now and going to Holy Communion, they replied that the number had really gone down and that there should have been a lot more, even though the Eucharist was the daily bread Our Lord wanted people to ask Him for, and it was the practice of the early Christians to receive Communion daily. These newcomers, however, had diverted many people from this, and it was no wonder they listened to them because nature found this to its advantage, and those who followed its inclinations willingly embraced those new opinions. This seemed to relieve them by freeing them from the care and trouble of having the required dispositions for receiving Holy Communion worthily and frequently, and for maintaining themselves in them.

He added that he had known a devout upperclass lady who, on the advice of her directors, had, for a long time, continued to go to Communion every Sunday and Thursday, but, when she put herself in the hands of a confessor who followed this new teaching, through I don't know what curiosity and affectation of greater perfection, he had turned her away from this holy practice and allowed her to receive Communion only once a week in the beginning, then once every two weeks, then once a month, etc. . . . One day, after remaining in this lax situation for eight months, she began to reflect and found herself in a very deplorable state, filled with imperfections and subject to committing a great number of faults, being complacent in vanity and letting herself get carried away by anger, impatience, and her other passions; in a word, she was completely different from what she was before staying away from Holy Communion. "O unfortunate creature," she said in tears, "in what state do I find myself now, how have I fallen, and where will all these disorders and fits of rage end? How did such an unfortunate change happen to me? Doubtless, it stems from abandoning my previous guidance and listening to and following the advice of those new directors, which is really very harmful since it produces such bad effects, which I know from my own experience. O my God, you who are opening my eyes to recognize this, give me the grace to free myself entirely from it."

After separating herself from her new directors and giving up their dangerous maxims, which had upset her completely and almost caused her to be lost, she got back on track again through more salutary advice and a return to her former practices, frequenting the sacraments as before, with the requisite dispositions, and in this she found peace of conscience and the remedy for all her failings.

106. - VIRTUES OF BROTHER SIMON BUSSON¹

October 1, 1649²

After questioning five members of the Community, M. Vincent concluded in these terms: "Oh, what beautiful things, Messieurs, what beautiful things we've heard about our coadjutor Brother, who was with us for only two or three years!³ What an accumulation of many beautiful, divine virtues! O my God, my God! May Your Holy Name be forever blessed! We have here a great model of courage for our Brothers, a great source of edification for our clerics, and a great reason for me, a wretched man and miserable sinner, to be ashamed on hearing it. . . . *O mon Dieu*. . . ! M. Duval, who was a great Doctor of the Sorbonne, and even greater because of the holiness of his life, said to me one day, 'You see, Monsieur, these good people compete with us at the gates of paradise, and they win the contest.' How is that? Do knowledge and other honorable qualities prevent our sanctification? No, it's our own wretchedness.

Conference 106. - *Notices*, vol. II, p. 437.

¹Simon Busson, born in the town and diocese of Le Mans, entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother during Lent of 1648, when he was about twenty-two years of age. He died on September 6 or 7, 1649. His biography is given in *Notices*, vol. II, pp. 431-38.

²The date of the conference is made known to us by the author of the biographical sketch of Bro. Busson. Although *Notices* erroneously lists the year as 1652, we know it is 1649 from the letter M. Vincent wrote to René Alméras on September 11, 1649 (cf. **III**, 477-79).

³In his letter to René Alméras, Saint Vincent gives a more accurate length of time of "eighteen to twenty months." As noted above, Simon Busson entered the Congregation "during Lent of 1648."

“What I have to say to you on the occasion of this talk is that I’ve never observed a single fault in this young man—not one. When I used to speak to him, I seemed to see a spotless angel in him, a man anticipated by grace, filled with humility, obedience, mortification, gentleness, piety, and fervor. He had all those virtues, at least to a greater than average degree.”

M. Vincent was interrupted here by a Brother who had already spoken but wanted to add a detail. He stopped him, saying, “Ah, Brother, they’re ready to ring the bell for prayers, and there are so many things to say about the virtues we’ve observed in this good young man that several hours wouldn’t suffice! There are so many people here who knew him, and there isn’t time for them to be able to share all the good things they observed; that’s why I wonder if we shouldn’t postpone this topic for another conference, for the general edification and to melt our coldness; we’ll have to think about that. While waiting for everything to be said for the glory of God and the edification of the Congregation, may God grant us the grace to benefit from the sweet perfume that has been poured into our hearts! Ah, if only virtues could be seen as we see the plants that sprout in the earth, how much they’d be appreciated in a poor body! If we went into this more deeply, how many things we’d find, even more excellent than the ones that have been said! Meanwhile, let’s thank God together for the graces He gave to good Bro. Simon, and let’s ask Him to grant us the grace of imitating his virtues. *Or sus, in nomine Domini!*”

107. - GRATITUDE DUE TO ADRIEN LE BON

April 9, 1651¹

When Adrien Le Bon had breathed his last sigh, M. Vincent stood up and said to the Missioners present in the mortuary chapel,

Conference 107, - Manuscript of Bro. Louis Robineau, p. 136.

¹The day Adrien Le Bon died.

“*Or sus*, my dear confreres, our good father is now before God; we are his children, and he a father who was as good to us as any father could have been to his children. May it please Your Goodness, my God, to apply to him the good works and modest services the Company has tried to render You until now! We offer them to You, my God, entreating You to attribute them to him. Many of us were, perhaps, needy, and he provided us with what was necessary for our food and housing. We must be careful, brothers, not to fall into that wretched sin of ingratitude toward him and all those good priests,² whose children we are and whom we must acknowledge and respect as such. We must be most grateful to them for the good they’ve done us, and strive every day to remember the Prior and to pray for him.”

107a. - RETREAT MINISTRY¹

At the beginning of the conference M. Vincent said that he had thought several times of presenting this topic and had the same reasons as for the ones already given, since it’s very likely that God gives the same thoughts to almost everyone.

First reason: The Company has a vocation for that; God has called it for that; the proof is that it began without this intention and with no thought of having these retreats; nevertheless, it crept in imperceptibly. “I think,” he said, “it was M. Coqueret² who started

²The Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, who were still living at Saint-Lazare, their former Priory.

Conference 107a. - Manuscript of Conferences, summary. Following the indication given by André Dodin, C.M., in his *Entretiens spirituels*, p. 1159, the editors have repositioned here Coste’s Conf. 224 (XII, 437-44).

¹The conference is undated. This topic was treated at Saint-Lazare in 1652, on October 27, 1656, January 17, 1659, April 16, 1660, and doubtless several times before 1650.

²Jean Coqueret was born in Pontoise in 1592 and died in Marseilles on October 7, 1655. He was a Doctor of the Collège de Navarre, head of the Collège des Grassins, Superior of the Discalced Carmelites of France, and a friend of Saint Francis de Sales, André Duval, and Saint Vincent with whom he had given a mission in Villepreux in 1618. Saint Vincent consulted him before introducing vows into his Company and invited him to the conferences held at Saint-Lazare on the subject of Jansenism.

this, and afterward he sent students here; in a word, the first brought the second; the second, the third; and so on until now.”

Second reason: According to Saint Augustine, practices whose authors are unknown come from the Apostles and, consequently, from God. The same is true for this retreat ministry, for it has no author—God is the author. M. Vincent added that he had nothing to do with it, no more than with all the other practices of the house, “as we’ll see some day,” he said. “Assuming this to be true, let’s look at the obligation we have to continue this work, since it’s God who established it and is its author; and we must do it with fervor, for fear that God may transfer the grace He’s given us to others, who might make better use of it, which will happen if we carry it out halfheartedly.”

Third reason: God uses some of the poorest workers in His Church for this ministry. If we were to consider great talents, virtues, piety, and devotion, we’d be the most insignificant of them; this is the sentiment each and every individual must have regarding himself; and if an individual is obliged to have it, why not the Company, since it’s composed of individuals? All maxims are transgressed. *Nemo dat quod non habet*;³ nevertheless, we have some men here who have been directing the ordinands, some for eighteen months, some for a year, some for six months, some for four months. Poor seminarians, who yesterday were still in sin, are becoming the directors of those with whom they led a worldly life. “You see, Messieurs, how we had nothing to do with that; it’s God who is acting.” Then M. Vincent added: “I have some other reasons, but let’s move on to the means.

The first means is to reflect that this is the work of works, greater than that of creating the world, for it’s a question of making a just man of a sinner and a perfect man of a man given over to vice. The creation of the world isn’t as difficult because *Dixi et facta sunt*,⁴ said God; nothingness can, in no way, resist God; but, in this practice, the will of the sinner, his inclinations, his passions, his temptations—are all opposed to God’s plan. “You see, Messieurs, the

³*No one gives what he does not have.*

⁴*I spoke and they were done.* Cf. Ps 33:9 (NAB)

greatness of this work. It's as difficult to see a sinner withdraw from sin as to make a stone rise from the ground or make a feather and fire drop down. Yet, that's God's plan; it's His Will that we make a just man of a sinner and cause God to reign in his soul in order to win him over more perfectly to Him."

Second means: To give ourselves sincerely to God for this and ask Him to give us His Spirit to direct the retreatants, making, for this purpose, frequent aspirations to God and desires for His glory. Alas, we can do nothing in this; it's up to Him to do it! Then M. Vincent related what a Franciscan had written on how to visit the sick, namely, when leaving the house to go to them, to lift our hearts many times to God. "Alas, my God! Grant me the grace to comfort this poor sick person, etc. We can likewise say, 'Alas, my God! Grant me the grace to be a help to this retreatant! Since this is Your Will, my God, grant me the grace to make this visit well; it's for love of You.' " And he said that this prayer was very efficacious and was the best means. He told of the faith of a clerk in one of the highest courts, who has such confidence in prayer that, whenever he asks for something for the glory of God, he gets it, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and Saints Peter and Paul.

Third means: To believe that God is sending us the retreatant. Our Lord was sent by His eternal Father to the lost children of Israel: *Misus sum ad oves quae perierant*.⁵ That's the grace He gives us through this ministry; He chooses us to direct the retreatants. And M. Vincent said that Jesus Christ had been given by God to redeem the Israelites and they had been given to Jesus Christ to be redeemed; and the prophet had been given to the widow of Sarepta⁶ so that he'd obtain a child from God for her. Reciprocally, the widow had been given to the prophet to provide for his needs. And it mustn't be thought that it's by chance that we're given to the retreatants as directors, but that God has selected us for that and, in bringing them here, has chosen a certain individual—Pierre, Jean, or Antoine—to be their director. He's also given them the grace to guide them, so much so that, when the Superior or someone else appoints us to direct them,

⁵*I was sent to the lost sheep.* Cf. Mt 15:24. (NAB)

⁶*The widow of Zarephath.* Cf. 1 Kgs 17:7-24. (NAB)

we must lift our hearts to God and say to Him, "My God, You're the one who is sending me to him; give me Your grace"; and before going anywhere else, we should prostrate ourselves humbly before the Blessed Sacrament of the altar and say to Our Lord, "My God, You're sending me a soul redeemed by Your Precious Blood, and You want me to help it to benefit from Your blood that has been shed for it so that it can say at Judgment that I am, along with You, my God, its co-redeemer; I thank You for this"; or something similar, etc.

After that, we should go to see the retreatant, and, on our way there, pray and offer him to God, pray to his Guardian Angel, and be filled with the spirit of humility and not that of a theologian, a person in authority, or someone with elegant manners—*mon Dieu*, no! Enter his room modestly cheerful and cheerfully modest, say the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* with him, then ask him how he is, and, after he says, "Fine, thank God," then say, "God be blessed, Monsieur, for the desire He's given you to make a retreat!" Congratulate him and try to cheer him up because he may be worried about what's going to happen to him in a room all by himself.

If possible, we should blend the three colors of modesty, cheerfulness, and gentleness, striving by this means to show them that we're coming with submission and humility, as if we were saying to them, "Alas, Monsieur! I've been chosen to guide you, but I'm incapable of it; I've been a great sinner and still am; I've made poor use of God's graces and still do," and something similar. Be careful not to ask them who they are. Several have been vexed by a question like that. Doubtless, they'd say to themselves, "What a curious man he is! He's asking who I am!" Ask them instead, "Monsieur, have you ever made a retreat before?" They'll say yes or no. If they say yes, then add, "So, do you remember the practices?" Usually they'll reply, "Yes, Monsieur, but only in general; I'd be glad if you remind me of them." And then you can list the practices for them.

After that, explain to them the purpose of the retreat: to become a perfect Christian and perfect in the vocation in which they are: a perfect student, if the person is a student; a perfect soldier, if he's a soldier; a perfect judge, if he's a man of the law; a perfect clergyman like Saint Charles Borromeo, if he's a priest.

Lastly, let's be disinterested; let's not tell them anything that might give the impression that we'd really like to have them in our Company; let's not even think about that; *non concupisces*.⁷ "And I'd have you know, Messieurs, that, if God has given some grace to this Little Company, it's because of the disinterestedness it has always had. That's enough for the first meeting."

M. Vincent added that the reasons given by Bro. Charles had really touched him, as did the others, by the grace of God, that those sentiments aren't the result of human will but of God's Will, and that he had never seen the Company so touched. Then, going back to what he was saying, he repeated forcefully and earnestly, "Disinterestedness," adding that each individual must follow the attraction of God and His Will concerning it. "God forbid, brothers, that we might bend and incline God's Will to our own! We must follow it. Alas! Isn't that right, Messieurs? Isn't it right?"

M. Vincent gave the example of a young man, the most refined man he had seen among those making retreat. The man indicated to the late M. de la Salle, who was responsible for guiding him, that he wanted to join the Community, and would have decided to do so if someone had given him the slightest word of encouragement about it. M. de la Salle consulted M. Vincent, who advised him not to say anything. And the young man is now with the Capuchins, where he's doing wonders. "We must have this disinterestedness; we must follow the Will and attraction of God.

"But you'll say to me, 'The purpose of the retreat is to grow more holy in one's vocation or to make a choice of one; what if it now happens that the retreatant wants to choose one, that is, to enter religious life?' In that case, don't be small-minded in judging, but judge that according to the maxims of the Gospel. For example, if it happens that the man who wants to leave the world is a clerk of the court, a judge, or a priest, who is doing great good where he is, human judgment will immediately say that he must be persuaded to remain in his vocation. *O mon Dieu!* Don't act like that, but follow the maxims of the Gospel in the story of that young man who asked

⁷*You shall not covet.*

Our Lord how to be perfect. 'Keep the Commandments of God,' the Savior replied to him. And since the young man maintained that he had always done that, Our Lord added, *Vade et vende omnia quae habes et da pauperibus*.⁸ Keeping the Commandments is great perfection, but it doesn't suffice for everyone. When the young man added, 'My father is dead; allow me to go to bury him,' Our Lord replied, *Sinite mortuos sepelire mortuos suos*.⁹ *Quoi!* It seems to me, my God, that You're advising something unjust, seeing that You made a law that those who dishonor their parents should be dishonored. To leave one's parents to follow Our Lord isn't to dishonor them. So, during the retreat, everything must be determined according to the maxims of the Gospel.

"It's also a good thing to ask the retreatants why they're making a retreat, and they're pleased about this. You'll say to them, 'Messieurs, some come to root out a certain vice that torments them most of all, others, to acquire some virtue, others to become more perfect in their vocation, others to make a choice of one.' "

M. Vincent noted that the retreat must be directed toward the goal of the one who's making it. He said that there are general goals, such as to make a sinner a just man. He added that, when the retreatants say that they want to leave the world, we must reply that they're respecting that thought; and, when they go into detail, expressing their desire to become a Carthusian, a Capuchin, or a Jesuit, recommend to them that they likewise respect those thoughts, without ever indicating that we'd like them to come to us. If they say that they'd like to belong to our Company, let's invite them again to respect that thought and help them with it as we'd help them if they expressed another desire. Even though they conceive that good desire here in this house, that's no reason to discourage them from it.

In the end, M. Vincent exhorted the Company—the older men, those who follow them, and the young—to continue this practice after his death, even should they happen to grow weary of it, which was to be expected.

⁸*Go and sell all that you have and give to the poor.* Cf. Lk 18:22. (NAB)

⁹*Let the dead bury their dead.* Cf. Lk 9:60. (NAB)

Means for guiding the retreatants: When they don't know how to meditate, we have to ask them if they've studied. If they're theologians or physicians, tell them that it's almost a study of philosophy or theology, except that theologians and physicians use only memory and understanding, whereas in meditation, we also have recourse to the imagination and feelings; and we should add that reasons are drawn from considerations. If they haven't studied, advise them to take their book in hand, pause at a particular consideration, and dwell on it for a long time, in order to allow it to permeate the memory so that they'll remember it; to permeate the understanding so that they may understand the truth; and lastly, the will, so that they may become attached to it. *Sicut oleum effusum*.¹⁰ M. Vincent strongly recommended this practice.

Second means: We should recommend to the retreatants fidelity to the regulations of the retreat. It's important to discern the social status of those we're guiding; for a person of the upper class must be guided differently from an ordinary man, and an ignorant person differently from a scholar. Fidelity, however, is to be recommended to all of them. It may be useful to use some comparison with persons of the nobility; for example, just as the diets ordered by doctors are very beneficial if they're well observed, the same holds true for the regulations of a retreat. We have to instruct them well regarding the daily schedule, the method of meditation and of the particular examen, recommend that they never leave their rooms before getting dressed, and to keep silence.

¹⁰As oil poured out. Cf. Sg 1:3. (NAB)

108. - CONDEMNATION OF JANSEN¹

[June 1653]²

At the time of the condemnation of the five propositions of Jansen, M. Vincent told his Community that they should thank God for the protection He was giving to the Church, and especially to France, to purge it of its errors, which were about to plunge it into great disorder. He added to this that, although God had granted him the grace of discerning error from truth even before the definition of the Holy Apostolic See, nevertheless, he never had any feeling of vain complacency or hollow joy because his judgment had been found to be in conformity with that of the Church; he recognized clearly that this was an effect of the pure mercy of God, for which he was obliged to render Him all the glory.

Conference 108. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. II, p. 7, excerpt.

¹Cornelis Jansen, better known as Cornelius Jansenius, was born in the village of Accroi (Holland) in 1585. In 1604 he went to Paris to study. There he met Abbé de Saint-Cyran, who found a tutorship for him in the house of a councillor; then he took him to Bayonne, where they read together the writings of Saint Augustine. Jansen returned to Louvain in 1617, took his doctorate there, became the head of the Collège de Sainte-Pulchérie, and in 1630 received a chair of Holy Scripture at the university of that city. Through the influence of Philippe IV he was raised to the diocese of Ypres and was consecrated in 1636. Two years later he died of the plague in sentiments of submission to the Holy See. Still extant is a book against France, *Mars Gallicus*, several commentaries on Holy Scripture, and letters to his friend Abbé de Saint-Cyran. The most important and best-known among his works is *Augustinus*, which caused a violent storm in the Church. This book, the result of twenty years of work, was published in Louvain in 1640 and Rouen in 1652; it was censured by Pope Urban VIII and several times later on.

²Reference to the Five Propositions of Jansen allowed Coste to assign the date. They were condemned in Rome on the eve of Pentecost, May 31, 1653, but the condemnation was not promulgated until June 9. On July 5, the saint wrote to an ally, Alain de Solminihac, Bishop of Cahors, that the news had reached Paris (cf. IV, 592).

108a. - CONDEMNATION OF JANSEN

[June 1653]

On reading what the Holy Father said to the deputies, M. Vincent said that in his entire life he had not received such a great abundance of light and grace as he had received on this subject, especially on the eve and the day of the proclamation of the Bull, and, even though His Holiness was seventy-nine years of age, he wanted to be personally present at the conferences, sometimes remaining there three to four entire hours, despite the entreaties and remonstrances his relatives and friends were making to him not to do this, that it would be the death of him and would do serious damage to his health. Despite all these entreaties and remonstrances, however, the interior impulses he had were so insistent that he made no account of the entreaties and remonstrances.

He also told us that the worst dread of his entire life has been that he might give himself over to the new opinions and end up adhering to them. "From the time of the Arian heresy, how many columns have been shaken—from the time of Calvin as well," he said on this subject. Then, continuing his discourse, he said, "Now, we must thank God greatly for having preserved the Company from this evil that we see condemned today by the Holy See. When we find ourselves with some of those who espoused those opinions, we mustn't use any reproaches against them for that, but, rather, pass over it in silence."

109. - IN PRAISE OF JEAN LE VACHER¹

[Between 1648 and 1660]

“M. Le Vacher, who is in Tunis, is having great success there, although he’s always being subjected to some avania;² but virtue grows stronger in this, God gives strength, and a man feels his courage increase so as not to give in for any suffering whatsoever. When a heart is in this situation, it feels particularly strengthened by God; God gives such faith, clarity, and evidence of faith that the person disdains everything; then he’s not concerned about dying. There are many dangers and much to suffer daily in this office. He rejects any opportunity to return and spurns any occasion to rest, preferring to run every risk. Ah, Messieurs! Let’s thank God for that and ask Him to give us this spirit of going everywhere, of suffering, and of letting nothing stand in our way for the salvation of the neighbor.”

Conference 109. - Life of Jean Le Vacher, MS, p. 15, excerpt. This manuscript and *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission; Algérie* provided the information for the biography of Jean Le Vacher in *Notices*, vol. III, pp 606-43.

¹Jean Le Vacher, born in Écouen (Val-d’Oise) on March 15, 1619, entered the Congregation of the Mission with his brother Philippe on October 5, 1643. He took his vows in 1646 and was ordained a priest in 1647. When Julien Guérin, a Missioner in Tunis, needed help, Saint Vincent decided to send him Jean Le Vacher, who arrived in Tunis on November 22, 1647. Guérin’s death on May 13, 1648, followed two months later by that of the Consul, Martin de Lange, placed on Le Vacher the double burden of Consul and head of the Mission. In 1650 he added Vicar Apostolic to these titles. Since the Holy See would not allow priests to be in charge of the consulate, Saint Vincent sent a layman, Martin Husson, a parliamentary lawyer, who arrived in Tunis in 1653 and left in April 1657, expelled by the Dey. For two years Jean Le Vacher acted as Consul. He returned to France in 1666, and was sent to Algiers in 1668 as Vicar-General of Carthage and Vicar Apostolic of Algiers and Tunis. His life in Algiers was that of an apostle, and his death that of a martyr. On July 16, 1683, Algiers was being bombarded by Duquesne. After the Turks had used every device to make Le Vacher apostatize, they finally tied him to the mouth of a cannon, which shot his body into the sea. (Cf. Raymond Gleizes, *Jean Le Vacher, vicaire apostolique et consul de France à Tunis et à Alger (1619-83)* [Paris: Gabalda, 1914].)

²Payment extorted by the Turks; an insult or affront to France and the Church.

110. - POVERTY

October 16 and 23, 1654

On Friday, October 16 and Friday, October 23, 1654, conferences were given on the topic of the virtue of poverty, each of which had three points: first, the reasons the Company had to give itself to God to practice this virtue faithfully, in line with the promise each and every one of us has made to God; second, the faults the Company commits against this virtue which have been noted, and the ones it may commit against it; third, the means of being firmly grounded in the practice of this poverty in order to observe it well.

M. Vincent, who presided at this conference, did me the honor of calling me to write down the faults that might be reported by those who spoke on this second point, so that the contrary remedies could be applied afterward and advice given as to what had to be done. So, then, here are the faults that were reported, along with a few means and the names of those who spoke.

First, Bro. Alexandre Véronne¹ said that to be too lavish and liberal with the property of the house was a fault against this virtue of poverty, vowed in the Company; (2) to make and put our time into superfluous things, useless tasks, etc.; (3) it's against poverty to leave household items lying around in the kitchen and in the pantry or to give out too much meat, bread, wine, and other things; (4) to allow blankets and mattresses to be spoiled; (5) to borrow money from persons outside, and, under this pretext, to spend it for our personal use; (6) to refuse the clothing given us; (7) to have shoes made at the cobbler's the way we want, with high heels; this has necessi-

Conference 110. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS f^o 5.

¹*In the margin:* "Note: At that time Bro. Alexandre Véronne was in charge of buying provisions for the Community."

Alexandre Véronne, coadjutor Brother, born in Avignon on May 15, 1610, entered the Congregation of the Mission on July 22, 1630. He was infirmarian at Saint-Lazare and was so dedicated and capable that he won the esteem of all, especially Saint Vincent. His death on November 18, 1676, was announced to the entire Company in a circular letter of Edme Jolly, Superior General (1673-97). Bro. Chollier wrote his life, which was published in *Miroir du frère coadjuteur de la Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris, 1875), pp. 145ff. This work also served as the basis for his biography in *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 528-48.

tated having some of them remade for others because they couldn't be worn. The Jesuit Brothers we see at the market never wear anything but the same kinds of habits, shoes, hats, and cloaks, and they're all dressed alike. In the beginning, the Company of the Mission was in a similar state. How far removed from that is its present state! And we've seen M. Dehorgny² sometimes wearing torn clothes, an old cassock, etc.

The first means is to adopt the practice and to take whatever we're given, except things we can't wear, as, for example, a collar that's too high and, therefore, sometimes hurts us; in that case, we can mention it.

Second, never to want to be accommodated in everything, but be content always to lack something.

Bro. Tratebas³:

“(1) The first fault is to use without permission some article or goods we might have, since poverty divests us of the use of them, although not the ownership; and anyone who would spend a large sum of money, such as twenty livres, might commit a mortal sin.

“(2) To accept something without permission, such as a knife or something similar, is wrong.

“(3) Not to take proper care of the things in our use and which we must preserve; to leave clothes mud-stained or covered with dust is against poverty; as also to let them be soiled by vermin, because sometimes they have to be given to another person, and this makes it hard for him to accept them.

²Jean Dehorgny, from Estrées-Saint-Denis (Oise), entered the Congregation of the Mission in August 1627 and was ordained a priest on April 22, 1628. When Saint Vincent made the move to Saint-Lazare in 1632, Dehorgny took over the direction of the Collège des Bons-Enfants, which he carried out until 1635, then took up again (1638-43, 1654-59). He was Assistant to the Superior General (1642-44, 1654-67); Superior of the house in Rome (1644-47, 1651-53); and Director of the Daughters of Charity (1660-67). In 1640, 1641, 1643, 1644, 1659, and 1660, he made the visitation of several houses of the Company, reestablishing good order wherever necessary. His sympathy for Jansenistic ideas merited for us two beautiful letters from Saint Vincent, who had the joy of seeing him return to sounder beliefs. Dehorgny died on July 7, 1667. We still have twenty-three of his conferences to the Daughters of Charity and several letters.

³Antoine Tratebas was born in Allauch (Bouches-du-Rhône), near Marseilles, in October 1632. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on October 7, 1651, took his vows on October 20, 1653, and died of the plague in Genoa in August 1657. His family gave hospitality to Antoine Portail and other Priests of the Mission in 1649 during the plague that was ravaging the city of Marseilles.

“(4) Not to be content with what’s given us.

“(5) To complain about food, drink, or anything else.

“The first means is to adopt the practice; the second is never to ask for what we need, except for those things that aren’t apparent exteriorly; but for the ones that are apparent, we shouldn’t ask for them; rather, we should wait until those whose duty it is to provide them see that we need them and take care of that; the third is never to refuse the things that are given us.”

Bro. Lapostre:⁴ “Poverty must be understood as follows:

“(1) Never to appropriate for our own use anything belonging to the Community or things from the outside that belong to us, unless it’s with the approval of the Superior, of whom we must ask permission. To behave otherwise is to act contrary to the vow of poverty. We have neither the ownership nor the use of things belonging to the Community; for things from the outside that belong to us, we have only the ownership and not the use.

“(2) It’s also a fault against this virtue of poverty of which we’re speaking to buy anything without permission.

“(3) We may not give away anything whatsoever without permission, not even a meal to someone; and it’s a fault against poverty to do so.⁵

“(4) To allow the things we have for our use to be damaged.

“(5) To have books we’ve taken for our personal use, under pretext of taking care of them, without permission of the Superior. We must ask him beforehand if he approves of this.

“(6) In the sixth and last place, it’s also a fault to have anything without permission or to have anything superfluous.

“The first means is to adopt the practice of not asking for and not refusing anything, especially regarding unnecessary things. Sec-

⁴Nicolas Lapostre was born in Champigny (Val-de-Marne), Paris diocese. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on September 21, 1649, at twenty-three years of age, took his vows on October 9, 1651, and was ordained a priest during Lent of 1655.

⁵*In the margin:* “M. Vincent spoke up here to say that confreres should ask permission as rarely as possible to invite either relatives or friends to dinner.”

ond, it's advisable that someone be responsible for asking about the needs of each individual."⁶

M. Almérás: "The faults:

"(1) To have a cover on one's desk, valances for the beds, a pile of books, even with permission.

"(2) To ask for books, sometimes from the Assistant, sometimes from the Superior, etc., as, for example, as many treatises as we may want to read, and to keep the books that we've read on them.

"(3) The same for all sorts of things, be they knives or other superfluities, for fear of not having them, or under pretext that in a little while—for example, a year from now—we might need them.

"(4) To keep money left over from a journey we've made, and to ask the Superior, 'Monsieur, is it all right for me to buy something with this?' That's a fault; what we should do is to give the money to the Procurator and wait for two or three days; then, if we have to buy something, to go and ask the Superior.

"(5) When we travel, to have meals that are too fancy, and eat food that's too fine.

"(6) When we go from one house of the Company to another, to take away all that we can, filling our traveling bag, is a fault.

"(7) When we go either to give a mission or to the country, it's also a fault to take a large number of books with us.

"(8) To hide in a little box many items, such as small crucifixes, Agnus Deis, rosaries, and countless holy pictures, for fear that someone may see them."

All these things, he says, are faults against poverty, "and I've scarcely ever seen people attached to these little things remain in their vocation, and even in the seminary. One of the great means of being united to God is the practice of poverty, etc."

Then Most Honored Father M. Vincent concluded this conference in the following manner and took as the first reason for observing poverty this passage of St. Matthew: "Sell all that you have, and give it to the poor, etc."⁷

⁶*In the margin:* "Here M. Vincent recommended that those responsible for inquiring about needs should be very careful to do so, and told M. Almérás to see that this was done."

⁷Cf. Mt 19:21. (NAB)

“The second motive is that we’ve promised God to do this. One day Jephthah⁸ made a vow to God that, if he won the battle, he’d offer him in sacrifice the first creature he met on his return. His daughter, knowing that her father was coming back in triumph, wanted to go to meet him to congratulate him on his victory and rejoice with him. But when he saw her, he cried out, ‘O God! Does it have to be my own daughter?’ Then great agony seized him when he considered, on the one hand, what he had promised to God by vow, and, on the other, the death of his daughter, and perhaps she was his only daughter. When he told her that she had to die because of his promise to God, she asked him to give her some time to mourn her virginity, which he granted her. Then, at the end of this short period of time, he had her put to death rather than fail to keep his word to God. And look what Abraham did rather than fail to obey God!⁹

“We’ve seen ancient philosophers who disdained wealth to a very high degree, even though they were pagans; look at one of them—I forget his name. . . . M. de la Fosse, don’t you remember it?” And when M. de la Fosse replied that it was Diogenes, M. Vincent said, “All right, Diogenes, if he’s the one. One day, when Alexander had sent him a large sum of money, he thought to himself, ‘Alexander is sending me this because I’m a respectable man. For that reason,’ he said to those who had brought it to him, ‘tell Alexander to leave me as I am.’”

“Saint Gregory decided that a certain religious, in whose room ten sous had been found, should be deprived of the visit and conversation of the other religious; and the same saint ordered that, after his death, his body should be thrown on the garbage heap. Can you imagine, Messieurs? For just ten sous!

“When you came to enter the Company, you were told that the vow of poverty had to be taken and observed, and you said you were willing to do so; at the end of a year, you took Good Purposes; at the end of the second year, you took Vows. And then, after that, to act contrary to them, to be sorry for having done what you’ve done, to

⁸Cf. Jgs 11:1-40. (NAB)

⁹Cf. Gn 22:1-24. (NAB)

regret it and to say that, if you had to do it over, you wouldn't do it! O my dear confreres, what a deplorable state! Even to take steps to be dispensed from them is to be sorry for having done something good and to be in a very deplorable state! *O mon Sauveur! O mon Sauveur et mon Dieu!*

"The state of being Missioners is an apostolic state, which consists of leaving and abandoning all things, like the Apostles, to follow Jesus Christ and to become true Christians; and that's what several members of the Company have done, leaving their parishes to come to live here in poverty and, consequently, in a Christian manner;¹⁰ and, as a certain person said to me one day, only the devil can find fault with the Mission—with going, for example, from village to village to assist poor people to save their souls and go to paradise, as you see being done. Take, for instance, good M. Tholard who is there right now, Abbé de Chandénier¹¹ as well, and in places where they even have to sleep on straw.¹²

"(1) The first fault against poverty is to hide something—books, for example.

"(2) To buy something without permission, either with house money or other money from our relatives.

"(3) To have locked boxes or a suitcase in our room.

"(4) To have many books.

"(5) To have money.

"(6) Not to turn in our money to the Procurator when we come back from the country is against holy poverty, even if we have to wait until the next day to do this.

¹⁰*In the margin*: "There is a certain passage that states that to be poor and to be Christian is the same thing."

¹¹Louis de Rochechouart de Chandénier, Abbé de Tournus, was as remarkable for his virtue as for his noble birth. (Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XLIX, p. 240.) One of the most assiduous members of the Tuesday Conferences, he took great pleasure in giving missions, especially to poor persons. He declined several dioceses out of humility, accepting more modest but no less exacting functions, such as that of Visitor of the Carmelite nuns of France. To conform himself to the laws of the Church, he resigned all his benefices except Tournus. He died in Chambéry on May 6, 1660, after having been received the previous evening into the Congregation of the Mission. Several conferences on his virtues were held at Saint-Lazare; the remarks made there are recorded in *Notices*, vol. II, pp. 511-39.

¹²*In the margin*: "Note: These priests were giving a mission near Maule."

“(7) A Superior who lives very comfortably, and at the expense of the house, acts contrary to holy poverty; and the financial difficulties we see arising in individual houses occur only through the fault of Superiors who haven’t observed this holy virtue well and don’t see that others observe it. Today I received a letter from a member of the Company, who wrote me, ‘Monsieur, a certain Superior passed through here with a handsome coat and two suitcases; would you remedy that before you die?’ I told him that I would and that I’ll take care of that good-for-nothing.

“(8) An individual Superior who buys or sells something for the benefit of the house in which he’s Superior, commits a fault against this holy virtue, as also does the one who mortgages the same house without the same order from the General.

“(9) Anyone who has something done to beautify a building, or does something else that’s unnecessary, acts contrary to this virtue of poverty.

“The first means is to give ourselves to God to observe holy poverty well; the second is to go to visit the rooms from time to time. I ask the Officers to take care to do that. We can begin tomorrow with ours, then with M. Portail’s, M. Alméras’¹³ and M. Chrétien’s.¹⁴ In our room there are two blankets that I use to make myself perspire; they can be taken away. By the grace of God, our bedroom upstairs has no lock on it nor does that hall downstairs either.¹⁵

“I ask the priests, beginning tomorrow, to celebrate Mass—and the Brothers to offer their Communion of next Sunday—to thank God for having inspired a member of the Company (M. Portail, I think) to give a conference on this virtue; and I’d also like us to thank Him by the same means for having allowed us to receive today, and in such a timely manner, the advice I’ve just given you.

¹³Assistant at the Motherhouse.

¹⁴Jean Chrétien, born in Oncourt (Vosges) August 6, 1606, was ordained a priest on April 5, 1631, and entered the Congregation of the Mission on November 26, 1640. He was Superior in Marseilles (1645-53), sub-Assistant at the Motherhouse (1654), and Superior in La Rose (1655-62). On November 26, 1667, he was a member of the Troyes house.

¹⁵*In the margin*: “Note: The room upstairs is the little room where M. Vincent sleeps; the downstairs hall, Saint Joseph, is where he sees outsiders who come to speak to him.”

“With the help of God, I hope to write a circular letter and to send it to all the Superiors of the houses of the Company, asking them to have a conference on the same topic of poverty, and to send them what was done here so that they may do and observe the same things and visit all the rooms of the men in their houses.”

M. Vincent asked M. Almérás to go through all the rooms; to remove all the valances and other things, saying that the custom of the Company is to sleep without bed curtains; to get rid of the many books some men have in their rooms; to have the extra ones brought to the library; and to try to practice this virtue, which he said will draw down a thousand blessings on the Company.

III. - CHASTITY

November 13, 1654

There were three parts to this conference: first, the reasons for acquiring and preserving the virtue of chastity; second, the faults that may be committed against this virtue; third, the means of acquiring or of preserving it.

First point: It's a Commandment of God, which obliges us to observe chastity, etc.; (2) we've promised God to do this; there's a double sin for the person who contravenes it, just as there's double merit—or at least greater merit—for the person who takes the vow; thus, etc.; (3) because of the ministry of the Missioners, in which they have contact with many persons of both sexes, etc.

Second point: Faults that may be committed against this holy virtue: (1) in thought; (2) in words; (3) in deeds; (4) by omission.

In words: never say any words tending toward that sin, and never allow any bad, unclean thought to enter our mind.

Conference III. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 9.

In his deposition at the beatification process of Saint Vincent, Bro. Pierre Chollier declared that the summary of this conference was written by Louis Robineau.

In deeds: this shouldn't even be mentioned, and anyone in the Company who has reached that point shouldn't be kept! The Jesuits are rigorous about dismissing those they see subject to this accursed sin, and that's why we don't hear any talk about them.

By omission: not doing what God wants us to do in order to keep ourselves from committing this vice, not using the means given us. Touching, looking at, or listening to one another, etc., going to bed indecently, having an aversion to mortification, pampering ourselves, living very comfortably, being well treated in the house and in the country, having ourselves served the choicest foods, the best wine—these are all faults against this holy virtue of chastity.

Third point: Means. The first is to drink only a little wine and to water it well; second, not to speak to women alone or write them letters, and keep conversations short with them; third, not to undertake the direction of nuns. If the Bishop were to order this, explain to him the reasons we have for not doing it.

“ ‘Yes,’ someone will say to me, ‘but you’re doing it, Monsieur.’ I reply that it’s true that blessed Francis de Sales made me, wretched man that I was, responsible for the direction of the Visitation Monastery in this city, and that blessed Mother de Chantal urged me to do it. Nevertheless, ten to twelve years ago¹ I asked the nuns to relieve me of that, and for eighteen months I didn’t go to see them. They went to the Marquise de Maignelay,² and the Coadjutor, now Cardinal de Retz,³ ordered me to continue. And since, after the

¹In 1646.

²Claude-Marguerite de Gondy, sister of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondy and widow of Florimond d’Halluin, Marquis de Maignelay, whom she had married on January 7, 1588. Her husband was assassinated three years after their marriage, her son died in the prime of his manhood, and her daughter’s husband, Bernard, the eldest son of the Duc d’Épernon, Comte de Candale, mistreated her. Prevented by her family and Pope Paul V from entering religious life, the Marquise de Maignelay devoted herself to the service of the poor. She faithfully visited hospitals, prisons, churches, and convents. The Capuchins, Carmelites, Daughters of Providence, Oratorians, and her parish church all benefited from her generosity. To Saint Vincent she gave her time, service, and money, contributing to all his works, especially that of the ordinands. She died on August 26, 1650, and was buried in Paris in the convent of the Capuchin nuns, clothed in their habit. (Cf. P. Marc de Bauduen, *La Vie admirable de très Haute Dame Charlotte-Marguerite de Gondy, Marquise de Maignelay* [Paris, Vve N. Buon, 1666].)

³Jean-François-Paul de Gondy, Abbé de Buzay, future Cardinal de Retz, son of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondy, General of the Galleys, and of Françoise-Marguerite de Silly. On June 13,

death of the Archbishop of Paris, I tried again to be relieved of it, they got the Vicars-General to order me to continue; but, if God is pleased to have Cardinal de Retz return,⁴ I'll do all I can with him to be exempted from it.

"Furthermore, we should never go to see the Daughters of Charity and never enter their rooms, under any pretext whatsoever. At the conference I gave them the other day, I told them that, even if I should be the one to try to enter their room, they should shut the door in my face.

"Whenever we're talking in the parlor, we should always leave the door open and stay in a place where people can see us.

"We're going to ask whether it's also advisable to do away with the parlor in this house and go instead to the church to speak to them; the Jesuits do it in the church; so do the Oratorians, Capuchins, and several others. We have to give that a little thought. Remind me of this, M. Alméras.

"At confession, don't let the women's faces get too near ours; and I think that perhaps we'll have to have portable confessionals made with a screen.

"Unless the Bishops command it, never give the mission to nuns, and don't receive any letters from nuns afterward, under pretext of advice they may request, etc. Tell them, as the late M. de la

1643, he was named Coadjutor to his uncle, Jean-François de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, and was consecrated on January 31, 1644. Although he played an active role in the Fronde, the Queen—no doubt to win him over—obtained the Cardinal's hat for him on February 19, 1652. Mazarin, discontented with his influence and plots, had him imprisoned in the Château de Vincennes. Becoming Archbishop upon the death of his uncle (1654), and consequently more dangerous to the Prime Minister, Retz was transferred to the Château de Nantes, from which he escaped to Spain and then to Italy. In Rome, by order of Pope Innocent X, the Priests of the Mission gave him hospitality. Because of this, Mazarin very nearly let all the force of his anger fall upon Saint Vincent and his Congregation. After the accession of Pope Alexander VII (1655), who was less benevolent to him than his predecessor, Cardinal de Retz left Rome on a long journey to Franche-Comté, Germany, Belgium, and Holland. He returned to France in 1662, after Mazarin had died, renounced the archbishopric of Paris, and received in exchange Saint-Denis Abbey. Age and trials had made him wiser; during the last four years of his life, some persons even considered him pious. In this peaceful, studious, simple-mannered man, concerned with paying off his numerous creditors, no one would have recognized the ambitious, flighty, and restless Prelate who had stirred up Paris and made the powerful Mazarin tremble. The Cardinal died on August 24, 1679.

⁴He was in exile at this time.

Salle told the nuns in Cr cy, where he had gone one day to give the mission, ‘Don’t write to me.’

“Humility is a very excellent means for acquiring and preserving chastity. Those of you who know any men in the Company inclined to the contrary vice must inform the Superior, particularly when they’re persons we’d like to send far off, e.g., to the Indies, the Hebrides, etc. Anyone who doesn’t do this will be guilty of the faults they’ll commit on those missions and the harm that will come from this.”

112. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

January 25, 1655

At the end of Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent told us that the Company was to receive Communion for three reasons: first, to thank God for the Company in general, that it pleased God to give birth to the Mission on a day like the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, since the first sermon was given by him to prepare the people for a general confession² at the request of the late wife³ of the General of the Galleys, a sermon to which God gave a great blessing.

“Alas, my dear confreres, no one had ever thought of that! We didn’t even know what missions were; we weren’t thinking of them at all and didn’t know what they were all about, and that’s how it can be recognized that this is a work of God; for if there’s something in which human persons have no part, then God is the one who does it, and it comes directly from Him. Then He makes use of people to carry out His work. Now, two things moved the General’s

Conference 112. - Repetitions of Prayer. MS. f.^o 15.

¹ *Subheading*: Origins of the Congregation of the Mission.

² The sermon was given on January 25, 1617. January 25 was the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul.

³ Madame de Gondy.

wife to have those poor people make a general confession, one of which is If I tell the Company this, I'll be singling out a certain family; *mon Dieu*, shall I say it?"

At that he paused a little, then went on, saying, "Nevertheless, yes, I have to mention it because, in addition to the fact that no one is left from that family, they're all dead, so is the Pastor about whom I'm going to speak, and I've heard that one of his relatives, who was a very upright man and the last of this family, and who came to see me here a while ago, had also died recently. Now, the fact is that, one day, when the late Lady went to make her confession to her Pastor, she noted that he didn't give her absolution; he mumbled something between his teeth and did the same at other times when she went to confession to him. That bothered her a little, so one day she asked a monk who came to see her to give her the formula of absolution in writing, which he did. And when that good Lady went back to confession, she asked the Pastor to say over her the words of absolution written on the paper, which he did. Every time afterward, when she went to confession to him, she continued to do the same, giving him the piece of paper, because he was so ignorant that he didn't know the words he should have been saying. When she told me this, I was on the alert and paid special attention to the priests to whom I made my confession. I found that this was indeed true and that some of them didn't know the words of absolution.

"Now, this happened to that good Lady, when she was still only a young woman, and when she recalled it afterward, reflecting on the danger all those poor souls were in, she determined to find a solution to this tragic situation by having someone preach to them on how to make a good general confession and the need there was for making at least one during their lifetime. This was a success, as I've just said; the result was that, since I couldn't hear the confessions of all the people who came running from all directions, I had to send someone to ask the Rector of the Jesuits of Amiens to send help. He came himself, but stayed only until the next day because he had something else to do, and he sent some of his priests to help us. Next, seeing how successful that was, we thought about how to arrange for someone to go from time to time to that Lady's estates to

give a mission there. I was instructed to speak to the Jesuits about their taking on this foundation. I went to see Fr. Charlet,⁴ but was told that they couldn't accept this foundation and that it was contrary to their Rule. So, when we saw this, and also that there was no one willing to take responsibility for giving these missions, we decided to form an association of a few good priests.

"The other reason that spurred on the Lady was, as was said, the danger to their salvation, in which most of her poor subjects in the rural area found themselves because they hadn't made a good general confession.

"It was also that first reason that made us give ourselves to God to prepare men for ordination, to see that all priests are well instructed in the things necessary to their state of life, such as knowing well how to pronounce the words of absolution and the other things absolutely necessary for the use of the Sacraments of the Church. Who would have thought then, brothers, that God intended to do, through the Company of the Mission, the good that we see it doing, by the grace of God? Who knew that He intended to make use of it to go to seek out those poor Christian slaves on the farms deep inside Barbary to withdraw them, if not from a hell, at least from a purgatory? And who knew that He wanted to make use of it also in so many other places, as we see Him doing?

"So then, as I just said, our first reason for going to Communion today is to thank God for the institution of the Mission; the second is to ask His pardon for the faults the Company in general and each individual in particular have committed up to the present; and the third is to ask Him for the grace to correct ourselves and to carry out better and better the ministries in which it's engaged."

⁴Provincial of the Jesuits in France (1616-19)

113. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

Sunday, April 4, 1655

"We have reason to thank God for what has just been done for Cardinal de Retz, whom the Mission in Rome has welcomed into its house: (1) because in that we've performed an act of gratitude to our founder and Prelate; (2) because we've rendered an act of obedience to the Pope, who ordered the Superior of the Mission to welcome the Cardinal; and, lastly, (3) because we've also put into practice another beautiful act of obedience by obeying the command of the King, who, being dissatisfied with the conduct of Cardinal de Retz, disapproved of our welcoming him into our house in Rome. This caused him to tell the Superior² of the Rome house and all the French missionary priests there to leave Rome and return to France. In fact, the Superior has already arrived here. See how all the virtues follow one another and how one leads to another, and that one to yet another. How I esteem the fact that the Company rendered that duty of obedience to the Sovereign Pontiff! How I hope that the Company will adopt sentiments of deep gratitude and make a special profession of obeying the Sovereign Pontiff and of obeying the King his Prince, so that, when someone says to you, 'Go,' you go; when he says, 'Do that,' you do it; when he says 'Come here,' you do it immediately."

Conference 113. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 17.

¹*Subheading:* Hospitality Shown to Cardinal de Retz in Rome

²Thomas Berthe, born in Donchery (Ardennes), entered the Congregation of the Mission on December 26, 1640, at the age of eighteen, and took his vows on December 8, 1645. After ordination in 1646, he was assigned to Sedan. Convinced that he had been sent there as Superior, he felt humiliated to see less important work entrusted to him, and he returned to his family. A short time later he came to his senses, and Saint Vincent, who recognized his virtues and appreciated his talents, joyfully took him back. He subsequently served the Community as Superior in Picardy and Champagne and in other important positions: Superior at the Bons-Enfants Seminary (1649-50) and in Rome (1653-55); Secretary of the Congregation (1660); Assistant to the Superior General (1661-67); and Superior in Lyons (1668-71), Saint-Charles Seminary (1673-82, 1687-89), and Richelieu (1682-85). In October 1659 Saint Vincent decided that among his Missioners none was more suitable to succeed him as head of the Congregation than René Alméras or Thomas Berthe. He proposed the two names in advance, in writing, to the General Assembly that was to choose his successor. (René Alméras was elected.) There were some clashes between Berthe and Edme Jolly, the third Superior General (1673-97), which clouded his last years. Berthe died in 1697. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. II, pp. 247-313.)

114. - NEWS OF FRANCIS WHITE,¹ MISSIONER IN SCOTLAND

April 1655

“We recommend to God good M. Le Blanc, who was working in the Scottish Highlands. He was taken prisoner, along with a Jesuit priest, by the English heretics. They were taken to the city of Aberdeen, where M. Lumsden² is; the latter won’t fail to go to visit and to help him. There are many Catholics in that country, who visit and comfort suffering priests. So then, that good Missioner is on the road to martyrdom. I don’t know if we should rejoice over this or be saddened by it; for, on the one hand, God is honored by the state in which he’s being held, since it’s for love of Him. The Company would be blessed if God found it worthy of giving it a martyr, and he himself would be blessed to suffer for His name and to offer himself, as he’s doing, for all it will please God to ordain for him regarding his person and his life. What acts of virtue is he not now practicing—of faith, hope, love of God, resignation, and oblation—by which he is preparing himself more and more to merit such a crown! All that stirs us up to great joy and gratitude to God.

“On the other hand, however, it’s our confrere who’s suffering; so shouldn’t we be suffering with him? On my part, I confess that,

Conference 114. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. XI, pp. 208ff., excerpt.

¹Francis White (Saint Vincent refers to him as François Le Blanc), born in Limerick (Ireland) in 1620, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 14, 1645, took his vows on October 15, 1647, and was ordained a priest in 1651. He first went to Genoa, but stayed a very short time. Sent to Scotland, he evangelized the Highlands with unflagging zeal. The exercise of his ministry there was forbidden; in 1655, accused of saying Mass, he was imprisoned for five or six months in Aberdeen. On his release, he was warned that he would most certainly be hanged if he did not stop ignoring the laws. He left that district but continued his apostolate. Except for two sojourns in France (1658-62, 1665-68), White continued to work in Scotland until his death on February 7, 1679. He left behind the reputation of being a saint and an apostle. His portrait was long preserved and venerated in a room, known as the “Father White Room,” in Invergarry Castle. He is praised in several official reports addressed to Propaganda Fide. (Cf. “*Hibernia Vincentiana*, or The Relations of St. Vincent de Paul with Ireland,” *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 4th series, 14 [October 1903], pp. 289-316, published in French in *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 172-78, as “*Les relations de Saint Vincent de Paul avec l’Irlande*,” and reprinted in *Annales C. M.* (1907), vol. 72, pp. 354-62.)

²Thomas Lumsden, born in the Aberdeen diocese (Scotland), entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 31, 1645. On his return to his homeland, he traveled through northern Scotland: Moray, Ross, Sutherland, Caithness, and as far as the Orkney Islands. Driven out by persecution in 1663, he returned to France, where he spent the last years of his life.

naturally speaking, I'm very distressed by this, and I experience a tangible suffering from it; but, spiritually speaking, I think we should bless God for this very special grace. Look at what God does after someone has rendered Him outstanding services: He burdens him with the cross, afflictions, and insults. O my dear confreres, there must be something great that the understanding can't comprehend in crosses and sufferings, since God usually follows the service rendered to Him with afflictions, persecutions, prison, and martyrdom in order to raise to a high degree of perfection and glory those who give themselves perfectly to His service. Anyone who wishes to be a disciple of Jesus Christ must expect that; but he must also hope that if the occasions present themselves, God will give him the strength to bear the sufferings and overcome the torments.

"M. Le Vacher¹ wrote me one day from Tunis that a priest from Calabria, where the people are uncouth and boorish, had a great desire to suffer martyrdom for God's name, as the great Saint Francis of Paula formerly did, having been given the same inspiration by God; but he didn't carry it out because God had something else in mind for him. However, that good priest was so captivated by that holy desire that he crossed the seas to Barbary to seek the opportunity to do so. There, he finally found it and died courageously for confessing the name of Jesus Christ. Oh, if God were only pleased to inspire us with this same desire to die for Jesus Christ in some fashion or other, what blessings we'd draw down upon ourselves! You know that there are several kinds of martyrdom: for, besides the one we just mentioned, there's another in constantly mortifying our passions, and yet another in persevering in our vocation and carrying out our obligations and spiritual exercises. Because Saint John the Baptist had the courage to reprove a King for the sin of incest and adultery he was committing, and was put to death because of it, he's honored as a martyr, even though he didn't die for the faith but for the defense of virtue, against which that incestuous man had sinned. So then, it's a sort of martyrdom to exhaust ourselves for virtue. A Missioner who's very mortified and obedient,

¹Jean Le Vacher.

who carries out his office perfectly and lives according to the Rules of his state, shows, by this sacrifice of his body and soul, that God is well worth being served above all else and must be incomparably preferred to all earthly advantages and pleasures. To act in that way is to make known the truths and maxims of the Gospel—not in words but by conforming one's life to that of Jesus Christ and witnessing His truth and sanctity to the faithful and to unbelievers; consequently, to live and die like that is to be a martyr.

"But let's go back to our good M. Le Blanc and consider how God is treating him, after all the good deeds he's done in his mission. Here's a marvelous one, which some people would like to call a miracle: a little while ago, some bad weather arose, making fishing very poor and leaving the people in great need. They asked him to say some prayers and to sprinkle holy water on the sea because they thought that this bad weather was caused by some evil spells. So, he did it, and God willed that calm was immediately restored and the catch was plentiful.

"He wrote this to me himself. Others have also told me of the great difficulties he endured in the Highlands to strengthen the Catholics and convert heretics, the constant dangers to which he was exposed, and how he suffered from a shortage of food, eating only oat bread. If, then, it's up to a worker who really loves God to do and suffer those things for His service, and God allows other, even heavier, crosses to befall him after that, and he's made a prisoner of Jesus Christ and even a martyr, shouldn't we adore this conduct of God and, by submitting ourselves lovingly to it, offer ourselves to Him, so that He may accomplish His most holy Will in us? *Or sus*, we'll ask God, then, for this grace; we'll thank Him for the latest trial He wills to use to test the fidelity of that servant of His; and we'll pray that, if He doesn't want to leave him with us any longer, at least He'll strengthen him amid the bad treatment he's undergoing, or may have to undergo hereafter."

115. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

April 11, 1655

Speaking to a coadjutor Brother who had just declared that he didn't have the slightest difficulties with the duties of the house, M. Vincent said, "You have good reason to thank God that Our Lord is granting you this grace. Sometimes God acts like that in the beginning so that people will give themselves wholeheartedly to Him; He leads them first of all by that sweetness that causes them to accept everything, then He has them go to indifference; from indifference, to some petty distaste; from distaste to aversion; from aversion sometimes even to thoughts of blasphemy, aversion to God, to virtue, and to persons who maintain order. That's a trial God sends to those souls to make them grow in virtue. And those are signs of His love. Then, after testing them in that way, what does God do? He lets them enjoy such great sweetness and consolation that it's really admirable; and then we can say that the portrait is finished.

"I knew a nun² who had such an aversion to good and such great, abominable temptations, that she reached the point of having thoughts of hatred against God, with the result that she sometimes said that, if she were to leave religious life to give herself over to all sorts of sensual delights, she wouldn't be led to that for the pleasure of those vile things but, by this means, to displease God more by them and take vengeance on Him by going against His orders and laws. And, in the end, what happened after such a trial? When God withdrew her from this state of suffering, He led her into another that was so pleasing and peaceful, filled with such great, admirable

Conference 115. - Repetitions of Prayer. MS. f^o 16.

¹Subheading: The trial of temptation.

²Mère Claire-Marie Amaury had directed the Visitation Monastery of Paris for a little more than six years (July 6, 1631-May 20, 1638). Reelected in 1641, she died on October 10, 1651. During the first year after her entrance into the first Monastery of Paris, she remained for seven months in the throes of a horrible temptation, which Saint Vincent himself related at the process of beatification of Francis de Sales. (Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, vol. II, Chap. VII, pp. 331 ff.; *Annales Salésiennes* [December 20, 1907], p. 213; *Année Sainte*, vol. X, p. 225.)

sentiments of Him that in the end she died in the odor of sanctity. See how God sometimes guides certain souls.

“There’s another person I know,” he said to us, “who’s still alive. She doesn’t know what a temptation is, either of the flesh, or of an aversion, or of hatred, etc. Yet, no soul is perhaps more tempted by not being tempted than she is. That seems like a paradox, and yet that’s how it is; and she’s inconsolable in this temptation because, in Holy Scripture and the lives of the greatest saints, we read that God has made all the souls He has led to sanctity pass through sufferings; He himself, who is the Saint of Saints, willed to pass through them. And this has sometimes even led that person to think she’s been damned, since she’s outside the state of suffering; for, she says, ‘it’s stated that anyone who wants to live a holy life will suffer persecution.’³ I don’t suffer anything; therefore I’m not holy.’

“Now, to get back to you, Brother, you who say that nothing causes you any difficulty, I tell you that you have to humble yourself greatly and mistrust that state in which you now are. The true Christian must constantly act contrary to his inclinations, and even more particularly those who have given themselves to God, either in a religious Order or in some Community. Saint Paul states that he did the evil he didn’t want to do and had an aversion to doing the good he wanted to do;⁴ so then, we have to overcome ourselves in every difficulty and accept the trials and sufferings that come to us, as things presented to us on the part of God, and remain in the state in which He’s pleased to put us.”

³Cf. 2 Tim 3:12 (NAB)

⁴Cf. Rom 7:19 (NAB)

116. - ELECTION OF POPE ALEXANDER VII¹

April 1655

“O wretch that I am, pouncing on my food, devouring it like those just mentioned, what reason I have to humble myself...!

“It has pleased Our Lord to give us a Pope. I received this news when I was on my way to the meeting.² Cardinal Mazarin’s sister³ sent it to the Visitation Nuns in the faubourg Saint-Jacques, and they had someone inform me. He’s a good Pope, very knowledgeable about contemporary affairs, and has held the opposite opinion to the ones that have been condemned. The Priests of the Mission will please offer a Holy Mass of thanksgiving, etc. tomorrow, and our Brothers will assist at it and receive Holy Communion next Sunday for the same intention. The Ladies of Charity are to receive Holy Communion tomorrow for that intention.”

117. - OFFERING OUR ACTIONS TO GOD

April 30, 1655

“*Or sus*, God be praised for all that’s just been said! Let’s strive to benefit well from it, Messieurs. Let’s take great care to offer our

Conference 116. - Manuscript of Bro. Louis Robineau, p. 29. The opening sentence is apparently the concluding thought of a conference on intemperance.

¹Fabio Chigi, born in Siena on February 13, 1599, was elected Pope on April 7, 1655, and took the name Alexander VII. He commissioned the construction of the great colonnade of Bernini and confirmed the condemnation of Jansen’s *Augustinus* and the Jansenists’ Five Propositions. By the Brief *Ex commissa nobis* (cf. XIIIa, 417-19) he approved the vows taken in the Congregation of the Mission, and in the Brief *Alias nos* provided an official interpretation and approval of the Community’s vow of Poverty (cf. *ibid.*, 480-82). He died on May 22, 1669.

²Meeting of the Ladies of Charity.

³In a conference given to the Daughters of Charity on January 6, 1657, Saint Vincent reminded them that when the Queen “saw that the Cardinal’s sister was ill and wasn’t being nursed as she would have liked, said at once, ‘Truly, Madame isn’t being cared for properly; she must have the Daughters of Charity.’” (Cf. X, 209.)

Conference 117. - Repetitions of Prayer MS, f^o 17, conclusion of the conference.

actions to God, especially the principal ones; and, even if, in our morning offering, we offer all the actions of the day to God, it's still good to offer each one in particular during the day. I'm not saying that you have to offer all of them and be perpetually occupied with saying, 'My God, I offer you what I'm doing,' but it's good to do this above all for our principal actions. In that way, everything we do will be pleasing to God. Oh, what a happiness always to please God, to do everything we've done for love of God and to please Him! So then, Messieurs, let's give ourselves to God to do, from now on, all our actions for love of Him and to please Him. By this means, it will happen that every action, no matter how small, will have great merit before His Divine Majesty. Haven't we just heard what someone said, that it's this purity of intention that makes all actions equal? God grant us the grace of really profiting by all this!"

118. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

May 23, 1655

"In addition to the obligation we here have as Christians to honor this feast, we have a particular one because, by the Bulls of Approval of the Company,² a Pope has given us the Most Holy Trinity as our patron. That should animate all of us, such as we are, to have great devotion to this feast, as also to be very eager not to let any opportunity pass to teach this Mystery. I acknowledge that we've been lax in this and that we were more careful about it in the beginning than we are now that the Company is growing. Nevertheless, you see, some theologians hold that those who know nothing of this Mystery and that of the Incarnation are in a state of damnation; Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas even teach that knowledge of

Conference 118. - Repetitions of Prayer MS. f^o 18 v^o.

¹*Subheading.* Feast of the Holy Trinity.

²Pope Urban VIII issued *Salvatoris nostri*, the Bull of Approval of the Congregation of the Mission, on January 12, 1633 (cf. **XIIIa**, 296-304).

these mysteries is a necessary means of salvation. Now, if that's so, just imagine, my dear confreres, how important it is for us to teach these mysteries to those who are ignorant of them.

“(1) We're obliged to do this as Christians, for every Christian should instruct another Christian concerning the things necessary for salvation when he knows that he's ignorant of them.

“(2) We're obliged to do this as priests—those of us who are priests.

“(3) As Missioners.

“And, my dear confreres, even if some of you aren't priests and haven't done your studies, you're not, however, exempt from this obligation and, whenever you meet some poor person, you must teach him this Mystery if he's ignorant of it, even to a small number of persons or to a large number. We see that, when there's no priest, a lay person may baptize a child, and, in the absence of a man, the Church even allows women to do this in cases of necessity. In a word, we must strive to teach everyone about this Mystery. How many good souls do you think there are who never speak to a poor person without catechizing him—even lay women, even to the point where some go into the villages to instruct the poor people and have asked me to allow them to send them to us, when they find some of those good people who might want to make a general confession!

“Our poor Sisters of Charity are doing this with great blessing and success in the villages where they are! Just recently, a Lady told me that she was asking me to send her a Daughter of Charity, mainly to see that poor people were instructed in this Mystery so necessary for salvation, by opening primary schools because most of those poor people don't go to sermons or catechism classes, and thus are very often ignorant of this Mystery. Just think about that, Messieurs! That's how God acts when He sees that those who should be teaching aren't doing it.

“He puts others in their place, and they do it, even persons of the other sex. When I go through those parishes in Paris to visit the Charity, I often ask those good Ladies of Charity, ‘*Eh bien*, Ladies, how are our Sisters of Charity doing?’ And they reply, ‘By the grace of God, Monsieur, they're doing very well; all the poor are instructed in

the things necessary for salvation, thank God.' *Or sus*, may God be forever praised and glorified!

"I wish, then, (1) that all of us, such as we are, have great devotion to this feast and zeal for teaching this Mystery; (2) that we take the resolution never to be with a poor person without teaching him the things necessary for his salvation, if we think he doesn't know them; (3) that we earnestly ask pardon of God for our negligence in observing this until now, and that we humble ourselves greatly for it before God.

"We received news that, by the grace of God, good M. Lebas³ is better and is out of danger. He relapsed three times, and the third time they thought he wasn't going to make it. I ask the Company to thank God for the favor He's granted him in having preserved this servant of His, who's an excellent confrere and very virtuous. We haven't seen him here because he had scarcely made his seminary in Richelieu than he was sent to Agde, where he's been very exemplary. We thank God for all that, and also for the fact that M. de Martinis,⁴ who was sick in Rome, is getting better, but the doctors say he's not out of danger of relapsing unless he has a change of air."

³Toussaint Lebas, born in Josselin (Morbihan) on November 1, 1625, was ordained a priest on May 25, 1652, eve of the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, and entered the Congregation of the Mission in Richelieu on January 2, 1653. A short time later he was sent to the Agde house, where he took his vows in 1657, in the presence of Thomas Berthe. He was Superior in Narbonne (1671-73).

⁴Girolamo di Martinis (Jérôme de Martinis), born in Fontana Buona, Genoa diocese, (Italy) on May 15, 1627, entered the Congregation of the Mission in Rome on August 6, 1650, and was ordained a priest in September 1651. He took his vows in October 1652 and renewed them on October 22, 1655. He was Superior in Naples (1673-76).

119. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

May 27, 1655

At the Repetition of Prayer that was made on the feast of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, a seminarian who was making his repetition happened to say that he had kept rather quiet in order to hear God, who was speaking to his heart. M. Vincent corrected him and said, "Brother, that expression you just used, 'I listened to God,' is a little strong; you should say, rather, 'I remained in the presence of God to listen to whether it might please Our Lord to inspire me with some good thought or impulse.' Then he had the repetition continue, saying at the end, "I note, my dear confreres, that, in the meditations all of you are making, each one strives to present a number of reasons, and reason upon reason; that's noticeable. However, you're not making enough acts of affection. Reasoning is one thing, but it's still not enough; something else is needed; the will has to act, and not just the understanding; for all our reasons are fruitless if we don't go on to affections. We don't go far enough to the purpose for which meditation has been instituted. For example, today, the feast of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, we should have said, '*Or sus*, why was this feast established? It's to thank God for the institution of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar by Our Lord Jesus Christ on the day before His Passion, for the good of all the faithful.' Next, we should be stirred up to acts of thanksgiving for this great, incomparable benefit of the Son of God, make acts of thanksgiving, adoration, humility, and gratitude to Him for it; ask the angels to help us to thank Him for it, since we're unworthy to do it properly; and exclaim continually to God, 'O Lord, be forever praised and thanked for having given me Your Flesh and Blood for food and drink! O my Savior, how can I thank You worthily for this!' In this way we're engaged in fervent

Conference 119. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 19 v^o.

¹*Subheading*: During prayer, we should apply ourselves more to affections than considerations; news of Francis White [François Le Blanc] and Thomas Lumsden, Missioners in Scotland; practice of the rubrics is recommended.

acts of the will toward God. For you see, brothers, reason helps us, in truth, to see the beauty of something, but, for all that, it doesn't give it to us. For example, I see an apple on the tree, and even though I see it very clearly and find it very beautiful, I'm not holding it for all that, I'm not enjoying it, I don't have it in my possession; for it's one thing to see something, and another to have and possess it; it's one thing to see and consider the beauty of virtue, and another to have it. Now, reason helps us to see virtue clearly, but it doesn't give it to us; just as when one person says to another, 'Look at this apple; see how beautiful it is'; but, for all that, she doesn't give it to her to keep. Now, brothers, that's what reason does in our meditation.

"As for reasons to make us see the reality of the Body and Blood of Our Lord in this Sacrament, we have only to consider what's noted in Saint John, 'This is my body; this is my blood; the bread I am giving you is my body; the wine I am giving you is my blood.' No one doubts the truth of this except heretics, who want to make it understood in another sense. Our Lord himself assures us of this, even by oath, for He says that anyone who's unwilling to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood will not have eternal life. So, there's nothing to examine or to go over minutely regarding this. What we have to do in our meditation, however, is to exclaim to God by acts of faith that we must make, as well as acts of hope in this Divine Mystery, of charity, humility, gratitude, adoration, and dependence. *Or sus*, let's sincerely ask pardon of God for the faults we've committed with regard to this Sacrament.

"We've had some news of M. Le Blanc. Last evening I received a letter from good M. Lumsden, telling me that there's a great persecution going on in that country; also, M. Le Blanc has been moved from the city of Aberdeen, where he was, to a village, together with a Jesuit and another secular priest, with the result that we don't yet know what's going to happen. We had thought about sending someone to rescue him, but are finding this very difficult. What's to be done? Two reasons are preventing us: (1) if we ask for his release, we'll have to declare that he's a priest; and that would be to expose him because that's why he was taken prisoner. The second

thing that also prevents us is that we don't yet know how matters stand—between France and England,² that is—because affairs are embroiled. Scotland was beginning to breathe a little more easily these past few years, and there were several conversions; but, since about ten to twelve days ago, very severe orders have been issued again against the poor Catholics, with the result that poor M. Lumsden isn't at all safe. He tells me that there has been no news of M. Duiguin³ for a long time. Perhaps this is due to the bad weather—those mountains are completely covered with snow—for the letter I received yesterday is dated the month of March.

“Have you had them practice the ceremonies?” When M. Admirault⁴ answered no, M. Vincent replied that they were supposed to be doing this. “I've had someone ask Abbé de Chandenier⁵ to say Holy Mass and preside at the Office, and I want the Company to adopt this practice of always deferring (for example, to the Bishops who come to visit us, and to other devout persons) the principal functions that are to be carried out. That's how the first Christians acted with regard to important persons who came to see them. And it even happened at a Council of Bishops, who complained about other Bishops that, when they went to see them, they didn't show them this deference, since the ones who received the visit are supposed to defer through humility to the person who visits them. So then, it will be M. de Chandenier, who is a holy

²The manuscript notes that the saint said inadvertently, “France and Spain.”

³Dermot Duggan (In his letters Saint Vincent spells his name *Duiguin*), born in Ireland in 1620, was already a priest when he entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 26, 1645. In November of the following year he was sent back to Ireland, returning to France in 1648. Two years later he left for Scotland, where he spent the rest of his life amid great dangers, animated with the zeal of an apostle and the courage of a martyr. He died on May 17, 1657, on the isle of Uist, where an ancient chapel still bears his name and recalls his memory. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 114-21.)

⁴Charles Admirault, Master of Ceremonies at Saint-Lazare. Born in Chinon (Indre-et-Loire) on September 20, 1622, he entered the Congregation of the Mission on December 1, 1640, took his vows on December 2, 1642, and was ordained a priest in December 1646. For several years he was assigned to the Bons-Enfants Seminary, where he died in August 1661, after a long illness. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. I, p. 462, lists him as *Amiraut*; in vol. V [Supplement], p. 17, he is listed as *Amirault*.)

⁵Louis de Chandenier, Abbé de Tournus.

man, so modest and virtuous, compared to a wretch like me, and who is such a great example to us!”

And turning to M. Portail, he said, “M. Portail, what should be done?” After M. Portail replied, M. Vincent continued, saying that, in the old days, when the Church was just beginning, one of the duties of the deacons and deaconesses—that is, the deacons for the men and the deaconesses for the married women and girls—was to have practice for the ceremonies on the eves of feasts; for example, they had them practice the proper way to bow, to incline their head, to prostrate themselves—for, in that time, they often prostrated themselves on the ground—and so forth. “*Oh bien*, my dear confreres! Let’s strive then to perform this action properly, to make inclinations and genuflections well; for example, to genuflect properly, then to bow, when we walk in a procession.”

Then, when M. Portail told him that they didn’t bow, M. Vincent replied, “You’re right, Monsieur, see how stupid I am, how I myself need to be instructed, and how important it is that we practice this exercise so that those who don’t know what to do, or who don’t remember how, may be instructed in it.”

120. - PRIDE

June 11, 1655

M. Vincent asked M. Alméras his Assistant to see to it that this topic, along with envy and sloth, be given for meditation every month because, he said, “just as water wears away and seeps into stone—even marble—by dint of falling on it drop by drop, so there’s reason to hope that, by meditating often on those topics, we’ll be moved and incited, by the grace of God, to rid ourselves of those evil vices and to acquire humility, which is the contrary virtue. Sometimes here in our sacristy I contemplate the stone on which

water drips; even though it's hard and although the water falls only drop by drop, it still wears it away. In the same way, we have good reason to hope that those topics, meditated and meditated over and over many times, with God's grace will make some impression on our hearts, even though they're perhaps as hard as that stone. My dear confreres, please tell me what the Son of God came to do in the world; and, once He was here, how did He want to appear? As a humble man."

Then he cited this passage from David, " 'He was like a beast of burden, etc.'¹ Think about mules; are they proud because they're well harnessed, laden with gold and silver, and adorned with beautiful plumes? In the same way, Messieurs, if we're praised or held in esteem—perhaps because we've performed some action that dazzled people—let's pay no attention to that, let's make no account of it. For, are we the ones doing it? Isn't it God, Messieurs, who does all that? Isn't it to Him that all the glory of it is due? My Savior, please give us humility—holy humility. For, you see, brothers, if there are any people alive who must fear vanity, it's Missioners, because of their ministries; and if there are any people alive who must work to combat this vice, it's Missioners. Humility is one of the integral parts of the spirit of the Company of the Mission; so, if people tell us that we're ignorant and stupid, men lacking intelligence and guidance, we have to bear that patiently, not only bear it patiently but be glad to be considered as such."

¹Cf. Ps 73:22-23 (NAB)

121. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

June 13, 1655

“I recommend to the prayers of the Company the kingdom of Poland, which is in a very terrified state because of the huge number of enemies by which it’s being attacked. We’re praying to God for this because it’s a question of His glory, since it’s the enemies of the Church who are attacking it. I ask the priests to celebrate Mass today for this intention, as far as possible, and I ask our Brothers to receive Holy Communion. In addition to the reason I’ve just mentioned, we’re obliged to do this also because we’ve been called to that kingdom to work and establish ourselves there.

“I also recommend our poor, blessed prisoner M. Le Blanc and the other priests in the Hebrides, in the Indies, and in Barbary where our poor Missioners are working with so many blessings from God. Certainly, they must be a good example to those poor slaves whom they’re assisting, since we see this in the ones who just arrived here in this house,² for, if they were a scandal there, no doubt those good men wouldn’t be eager, as we see them, to come to be Missioners.

“Now I’m going to tell you about an admirable conversion. A short time ago, a Calvinist slave was converted to the Catholic religion. From time to time, the Huguenots in England send someone to that country to ransom people belonging to their group. Now, one of the men who had been sent went to that slave and asked him if he wanted him to ransom him. The slave replied that he preferred to be a slave all his life and remain a Catholic than to renounce his reli-

Conference 121. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 22.

¹*Subheading:* Difficult times in Poland; zeal of the Barbary Missioners; admonition to a Brother.

²Two emancipated slaves, Guillaume Servin and René Duchesne, had entered the Congregation as coadjutor Brothers.

Guillaume Servin was born in Amiens (Somme) around 1610. At the end of May 1655 he entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris as a coadjutor Brother and took his vows there on October 22, 1657, in the presence of M. Bajoue.

René Duchesne, born in Saint-Juire-Champgillon (Vendée) in August 1607, entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother in Richelieu on February 16, 1654, and took his vows on November 1, 1658.

gion to obtain his freedom; and so he refused. What an admirable conversion, Messieurs! In truth, Messieurs, I have good reason to fear that this man may be my judge on Judgment Day.”

Then, calling on a coadjutor Brother to whom he had some admonition to give, he said, “Kneel down, Brother.” And in presence of the entire Company, he said to him, “Brother, I’m obliged to remind you here of some faults you’ve committed but haven’t corrected at all, despite the warnings given you in private and in virtue of obedience.” Then, he mentioned aloud the faults of this Brother, which were so great that I didn’t want to write them down here. Let me just say that M. Vincent used very kind words with him, which showed a spirit filled with charity and compassion, accompanied nevertheless by firmness, forbidding the Brother to receive Communion until he was told to do so, and asking the priests not to give it to him if he presented himself. And he added, “And so that you’ll remember this, my poor Brother, you may not drink any wine for a week, and I ask our Brothers in charge of the pantry to see to that, so that, if he sits at a place where there’s a mug, they should go and remove it from in front of him. You may go, Brother!”

122. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

July 14, 1655

During his Repetition of Prayer, a coadjutor Brother said that he sometimes found it hard to go so often to confession and Communion, especially when some feast days occurred during the week. He feared that this might become a habit, and he might not prepare as well as he would if it happened more rarely. M. Vincent interrupted him, saying, “Brother, you do very well to fear not bringing

Conference 122. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 22 v^o.

¹*Subheading:* Confession and Communion when prescribed by the Rule; admonition to a Missioner; duty of the Superior to see that the Rule is observed; relaxation in the Benedictine Order; fear that the Congregation of the Mission might follow this sad example.

all the required dispositions to the reception of the sacraments; still, however, even though you don't experience interiorly a disposition such as you might desire—or so you seem to think—you mustn't fail to go to confession and Communion on the days the Rule prescribes, as has been the practice of the Company until now. It's an abuse, Brother, to think, for example, that, if you were to go to confession and Communion less often, you'd be better disposed. Furthermore, even, as you say, if you were to go less often you might feel more disposed interiorly—or so it seems to you—and if you did that with emotion and tears, it would be very much to be feared, Brother, that this might be an outpouring of nature and self-love, of which the satisfaction and pleasure it would take in something else might make it accept this one. That's why we must be steadfast in the observance of the Rules and the practices of the Company.

"Yesterday, I reminded a member of the Company once again that he's exempting himself from meditation and Chapter, and thus from the exercises of the Community; however, we see that he's doing nothing to correct himself; what should be done about that, Messieurs? Just imagine the suffering of a poor Superior, when he sees the laxity of his subjects and such great laziness, and how much he has to sweat and toil to restore everything to its original state! And God grant that he does it! In that case, we can call that a sort of miracle, so true it is that, once a Community has become lax and given itself over to disorder, it can never return to the original state of perfection from which it has fallen. Saint Paul says² of someone who had once been converted and totally given to God but later happens to fall from this state, that's it's impossible for that person to recover from it—that is, it's very difficult—and it's the same for a Community. For this reason, Messieurs, let's be steadfast in the observance of the Rules.

"What an account a Superior has to render to God if he hasn't had enough courage to hold firm in seeing that the Rule has been observed, and therefore is the reason why the Company has become

²Cf. Heb 6:4-6. (NAB) Although Saint Vincent here attributes the Epistle to the Hebrews to Saint Paul, modern scriptural exegesis has reservations about its authorship.

lax in the practice of virtue! What an account a lax Superior has to render to God! For, not only will he give an account to God of the evil that has been done in the Company (and of which he's been the cause through his laxity) during the time he's been Superior, which may be two or three years more or less, but also of the harm that's done during the time of his first, second, and third successor.

“What an account also to be given to God by a priest or a Brother who has been the cause, by his bad example, of part of the harm done in the Company, or who has been lax in its ministries, or has abandoned them to have less trouble and greater freedom!

“In the early days of the Benedictine Order, their ministry and practice was to staff a number of parishes and to teach and form little children, with the result that members of the nobility used to entrust their children to them to be instructed and taught good manners; many devout persons made donations of a number of possessions, houses, land, and legacies, and had churches built, which they gave to those Fathers and had them erected as abbeys and priories. The lax members thought that this was too much; that's why they said, ‘Why should we go to so much trouble? Let's abandon all these parishes and instructions, be content simply with choir, retain two-thirds of the tithes, and give the other third to a Permanent Vicar.’³ Let's recall how they talk, ‘Let's keep the tithes,’ that is, ‘let's hold on to the money.’ Look at what they did, Messieurs; they put Permanent Vicars in place and abandoned the instruction of children, and what did God do? Listen to this! He allowed almost all of the abbeys and priories to fall into the hands of laymen, Comendatory Abbots, and simple Priors with no responsibilities, for some of these Priors have only very minor responsibilities, such as seeing that a few Masses are said. That's the state into which we'll fall, if God doesn't have a hand in things.

³In earlier Church law a Parochial Vicar was a priest who either temporarily or permanently took the place of an absentee pastor. When a religious house had charge of a parish, the priest in charge, even though not a member of the house that staffed the parish, exercised all the functions of a Pastor, but the tithes then went to the religious house, which in turn paid the “Permanent Vicar.” This is the proposal being made here.

“*Quoi!*” A lax Missioner will say, ‘What good are so many missions? Go to the Indies, go to the Hebrides! Go, go—it’s too much! To prisons, to the Foundlings, to the Nom-de-Jésus!’⁴ All that is too much to take on; we should give it up; when M. Vincent is dead, there will really be a lot of changes; we should give up all those ministries; otherwise how can we do it all? *Quoi!* The Indies, the Hebrides, the prisons, the Foundlings, etc!’ The result, Messieurs, will be that we’ll have to say, ‘Farewell to the missions,’ farewell to the Indies, farewell to the Hebrides, the prisons, the Nom-de Jésus, the Foundlings, Barbary—farewell to all that!’ And who’s the cause of all that evil? A coward or some lax Missioners filled with love of their own convenience and ease.

“O my dear confreres, when you see that you can well say, ‘Farewell to all those ministries!’ Saint John said, ‘When you see people like that among you, consider them Antichrists.’ I say the same to you, brothers: when you see a lax Missioner talking that way, or inclined to have us abandon all those benefits I just mentioned, say boldly, ‘Behold the Antichrist.’ Yes, brothers, he’s an Antichrist. Say, ‘Behold the Antichrist is born; there he is!’ *Eh quoi!* And if, when the Company is still in the cradle (for the Company has just been born and is still in the cradle), if, I say, that’s the way things are, and it has nevertheless been assisted by the grace of God until

⁴The Nom-de-Jésus [Name of Jesus] hospice, founded by an anonymous rich merchant of Paris, who one day brought 100,000 livres to Saint Vincent for some good work. After discussing his plan with the benefactor, the saint earmarked 11,000 livres for the purchase of the house called Nom-de-Jésus, which belonged to Saint-Lazare, and 20,000 livres to enlarge the living space, should it become too small. He also constituted an income of 60,000 livres, to which 20,000 were added from Saint-Lazare, which later retrieved them; he allocated 5400 livres for chapel furnishings and 3600 livres for room and board for 40 poor persons for one year. All this was on condition that the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, together with laymen from Paris whom he would employ, would have the spiritual and temporal direction of the hospital and authority to admit and discharge the poor. The contract was accepted on October 29, 1653, approved by the Vicars-General on March 15, 1654 (the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal de Retz, was in exile in Rome), and ratified in the Parlement by letters patent in November. (Cf. Arch. Nat., M 53.) The work was already in operation in March 1653. Saint Vincent chose 20 male and 20 female artisans who were no longer able to earn their living, to occupy their time, they were provided with looms and tools. Men and women were housed in separate wings; they came together for Mass but were not permitted to see or speak to one another. The Daughters of Charity served them; a Priest of the Mission, in conformity with the terms of the contract, acted as chaplain. Saint Vincent often came to visit and instruct them. (Cf. XIIIa, 173-79, and Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XLV, pp. 211-13.) The Nom-de-Jésus later became the municipal health center (1802-16); its buildings were on the site now occupied by the offices of the Gare de l’Est.

now, taking on so many good works that are so pleasing to His Divine Majesty, and which He's been pleased to bless, how much greater reason should it do so when it's more advanced in age and has acquired greater strength than it now has! We see that, if a child has enough strength and courage, even though young and frail, to set out to bring something to a successful close, with what greater reason to do it when he's older, even twenty-five or thirty years of age. That's how it should be with the Company of the Mission. *Or sus*, blessed be God! May God be forever blessed and glorified! May it please His Divine Majesty to grant us the grace that the misfortune I just mentioned may not happen to the Company!"⁵

123. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

July 18, 1655

M. Vincent earnestly recommended to the prayers of the Company the health of M. Bourdoise, critically ill from apoplexy,² and highly exalted that good priest's zeal for the ecclesiastical state. God had made use of him to lay the foundation of that holy Company of priests of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, although he came from such poor circumstances that he had been able to finish his studies only with the help of the students who used to give him a few pieces of bread. Even when they'd throw it to some dog, hunger forced him to run ahead to snatch it.

M. Vincent also related that M. Bourdoise told him it was a great work to be engaged in instructing poor people, but it was even more important to educate the clergy, since, if they are ignorant, the peo-

⁵The wording of this last section that Abelly used (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. X, p. 105) differs notably from what is given here.

Conference 123. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 71. Repetition of Prayer.

¹*Subheading:* In praise of Adrien Bourdoise

²A cerebral hemorrhage, from which he died the next day.

ple they guide must, of necessity, be the same. And he was telling the truth, he was telling the truth.

Then M. Vincent asked God several times to give us a share in the great zeal this good priest had and in the great benefits he brought to the Church.

124. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

July 20, 1655

When a coadjutor Brother said that during his meditation he had repeated interiorly a few verses from the Psalms of David that referred to trust in God, M. Vincent interrupted him, saying, "Recalling from memory some passage of Holy Scripture and interpreting it in every way to get some meaning from it and summarizing it is a good practice."

When another Brother knelt down, asking to be excused from making repetition, M. Vincent said to him, "Since you're there on your knees, Brother, I'm going to remind you of a fault you committed yesterday. Someone came to see you, and you immediately took that person into the garden without permission. Brother, that's not good; you know that there's a Rule stating specifically that this is forbidden. It has always been the practice to follow this Rule exactly and to do nothing that's forbidden, without permission. None of the older members would act like that. Before he left, M. Almérás was just telling me that he was edified at seeing how exact the older members are; and he told me that when one of them was met in the enclosure by someone who had come to talk to him, he asked him to wait

Conference 124. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 72, Repetition of Prayer

¹*Subheading:* Not bringing outsiders into the garden without permission, students may take recreation in the enclosure on free days only, not to ask the gatekeepers indiscreet questions, keeping the doors closed and not admitting outsiders into the cloister.

until he received permission to speak to that person—something he had already done many times.

“I have another admonition to give,” he added, “and this concerns all our student Brothers: instead of taking recreation in the garden on days that aren’t free days, they take it in the enclosure.² I’m saying what I’ve seen; recently, I went to the enclosure (for the third time this year) and was surprised to see them there. Aren’t we sufficiently satisfied with the garden? Isn’t it big or broad enough? There are few in Paris as large as ours; if you go into all the houses, to the homes of the merchants, businessmen, palace officials, you almost never see them in their garden; almost all of them have to work night and day; after spending the entire morning at the palace, scarcely have they eaten dinner than they have to go to study some documents to be taken back in the afternoon. And we, we’re not satisfied with large gardens; we have to have the enclosure. And there are even some who aren’t satisfied with the enclosure. Do we have to lead a life that’s . . . how shall I say this . . . *lautior*? If we could make a French word out of this Latin, we might say, ‘more convenient’ . . . but that word doesn’t express it well enough, maybe ‘more pleasurable, more delightful, living in clover, free and easy, better off’ than people in the world. And don’t you think that the ordinands, who, from their windows, see us strolling aimlessly through that enclosure and those gardens at all hours, with those poor afflicted persons being taken for a walk there and the other people who work there, are saying to themselves, ‘Those men are really living the good life and have nothing to do’?”

“I’m really afraid that this is giving scandal. In fact, it’s typical of a man who has nothing to do, is scarcely occupied with God, and is dissipated, to go there at odd hours and without permission—which is never refused when there’s a need. And if someone had a certain condition requiring better air than that of the garden, he’d never be refused—and has never been refused, as far as I know. However, that attachment to this vast property of Saint-Lazare causes a lot of harm.

²The monastic enclosure of Saint-Lazare was the largest in Paris and comprised some ninety-two arpents—about a hundred acres—of land.

for there are other houses where there's no garden. In Crécy, Providence had given us one and has taken it away from us. In Sedan, there's no garden at all. True, they're about to purchase a house with a garden in the suburbs so they can walk there sometimes. And when men get bored in those houses, it's so hard for them to make up their minds to stay there! When they're there, they say that the air isn't good, they're always complaining, they're not happy, and they write to me. I recommend once again the observance of the Rule that forbids going into the garden and the enclosure outside of the time of recreation stipulated in the Rule, and even less to take anyone there without an express permission.

"There are also priests—yes, priests—not many, by the grace of God, but there's one often seen at our own gate, looking to see who comes and who goes, and who's passing by in the street. We see him asking the gatekeepers, 'Aren't there any letters for me? There should be. Didn't someone come to see me?' As if we didn't know that the gatekeepers must never say anything! That's really being dissipated and hardly being occupied with God. Don't do that any more! I ask the gatekeepers to take note in future of those who do it and to come and say to me, 'Monsieur, we see such and such a person coming to the gate.'

"I have another admonition to give, and I'm guilty of this along with the others. First of all, when we go through a door, we don't close it; I always find all the doors open, and I myself, wretched man, don't close them. It's bad enough that I don't see that this Rule is observed, but I'm the first one to break it.

"There used to be a large monastery in Hamburg, one of the most famous in Germany. It's now so dilapidated, as someone recently wrote to me, that it's being used as a public thoroughfare. The place where the church was, and where traces of the walls can still be seen, is a marketplace where meat and other things are sold. That's how God treats those who fail to keep the Rule. Nothing can be seen but the effects of the justice of God, who lays low those who abuse His graces and the ministries He's given them in His service, lays low this monastery, lays low that Order, lays low this Company. I'm very

much afraid that, through our negligence—and especially mine—our house may also become a public thoroughfare. As soon as someone has entered the courtyard, it's 'Where do you want to go?' 'To the cloister.' And there you have two doors open. In the farmyard, it's the same; and from the cloister into all the dormitories, all the rooms, and to the kitchen; but that door is kept closed.

"At the Jesuits' house on rue Saint-Antoine, they don't bring the people in; they have them wait at the gate or on the porch; that's how the house is laid out. Why, then, do we bring so many people into our cloister? So, I'm asking the gatekeepers, when someone comes to see one of us, to have them wait at the gate or bring them into a room but not into the cloister. If they're not people to whom we owe great respect, we can say to them, 'Monsieur (for example), do you mind waiting here; I'll go look for him,' and keep the person waiting as short a time as possible. I ask the gatekeepers to hurry to find the men being asked for, and I ask the latter to come as quickly as possible.

"I recommend once again the practice of this Rule, and I direct you to be careful to close all doors. When the Superior says 'I order you,' since his authority comes from God we can't disobey the order without disobeying God and what He's asking of us; for God is order; God and order are the same thing."

125. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

July 24, 1655

"I renew the recommendation I made, and which can't be made too often, of praying for peace, that God may be pleased to unite once again the hearts of the Christian Princes. There's war in all the Catholic kingdoms: France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Po-

Conference 125. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 78.

¹*Subheading:* General misery caused by wars; working unselfishly, zealously, and devotedly; example given by Missioners in Barbary and Madagascar, plenary indulgence granted to all Missioners at the hour of death.

land—being attacked on three fronts—and Ireland, even in the poor, nearly uninhabitable mountains and rocky areas. Scotland isn't much better off, and we know the deplorable state of England. There's war everywhere, misery everywhere. In France, so many people are suffering! *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* If, for the four months we've had war here, we've had so much misery in the heart of France, where food supplies are ample everywhere, what can those poor people in the border areas do, who have been in this sort of misery for twenty years? Yes, it's been a good twenty years that there's always been war there; if they sow their crops, they're not sure they can gather them in; the armies arrive and pillage and carry everything off; and what the soldier hasn't taken, the sergeants take and carry off. After that, what can be done? What will become of them? They must die. If there's a true religion . . . what did I say, wretched man that I am. . . ! God forgive me! I'm speaking materially. It's among them, among those poor people that true religion and a living faith are preserved; they believe simply, without dissecting everything; they submit to orders and are patient amid the abject poverty they have to suffer as long as it pleases God, some from the wars, others from working all day long in the great heat of the sun; poor vine dressers, who give us their labor, who expect us to pray for them while they wear themselves out to feed us!

"We look for the shade; we don't want to go out in the sun; we're so much in love with our comforts! During the mission we're at least in church, sheltered from the bad weather, the heat of the sun, and the rain, to which those poor people are exposed. And we cry for help if someone gives us something to do that's the slightest bit out of the ordinary. *My room, my books, my Mass!* Well, enough of that! Is that what it means to be a Missioner, to have all our comforts? God acts as our provider here. He takes care of all our needs and more than our needs, He gives us a sufficiency and more than that. I don't know if we think enough about thanking Him for this.

"We live on the patrimony of Jesus Christ, on the sweat of poor people. When we go to the refectory, we must always think, 'Have I earned the food that I'm about to eat?' I've often had this thought that puts me to shame: 'Wretched man, have you earned the bread

you're about to eat, that bread that comes to you from the labor of the poor?' If we don't earn it like them, at least let's pray for their needs. *Bos cognovit possessorem suum*, animals know those who feed them.² Poor people feed us; let's pray for them; and not a day should pass that we don't offer them to Our Lord that it may please Him to grant them the grace of making good use of their sufferings.

"I was saying . . . What am I saying, miserable man that I am! Recently we said that God expects priests to halt His anger; He expects them to place themselves between Him and those poor people like another Moses, to oblige Him to deliver them from the evils caused by their ignorance and sins, and which they wouldn't perhaps allow if they were instructed and if someone was working for their conversion. It's up to priests to do this. Those poor people give us their goods for that purpose; while they're working and struggling against poverty, we're like Moses and must continually raise our hands to heaven for them. We're responsible if they suffer because of their ignorance and sins; so, if we don't sacrifice our whole life to instruct them, we're the ones who are guilty of all they suffer.

"M. Duval, a great theologian of the Church, used to say that a priest must have more work than he can do; for, as soon as idleness and sloth get hold of a priest, every vice rushes in from all sides: temptations of impurity and so many others! Shall I dare say what . . . ? I'll have to think about that; maybe for another time. O Savior! O my good Savior, may it please Your Divine Goodness to keep the Mission free of that spirit of laziness and of seeking its own comforts, and give it an ardent zeal for Your glory, which will make it accept everything joyfully and never refuse an opportunity to serve You! We're made for that; and a Missioner—a true Missioner, a man of God, a man who has the Spirit of God—must find everything good and indifferent; he accepts everything, he can do anything; for even greater reason, a Company or a Congregation, animated and led by the Spirit of God, can do anything.

"What have our Missioners in Barbary and Madagascar undertaken? What have they carried out? What have they accomplished?

²Cf. Is 1:3, (NAB)

What have they suffered? A single man takes on the care of a galley where there are sometimes two hundred convicts: instructions, general confessions to the healthy and to the sick, day and night, for two weeks; and at the end of that time, he gives them a party, going himself to buy a steer and have it cooked; it's their delight; one man alone does all that! Sometimes he goes off to the farms where slaves are placed, and he goes in search of the masters to ask them to allow him to work at the instruction of their poor slaves; he takes them on their free time and helps them to know God; he gets them ready to receive the sacraments, and at the end he gives them a treat and has a little party for them."³

He also mentioned Brothers Guillaume and Duchesne,⁴ who, after having been slaves themselves, were ransomed with the help of the Consul⁵ because of the zeal with which they were animated in their work with the poor slaves.⁶

"In Madagascar," continued M. Vincent, "the Missioners preach, hear confessions, and teach catechism constantly from four in the morning until ten, and from two in the afternoon until nightfall; the rest of the time is spent praying the Office and visiting the sick. Those men are workers, they're true Missioners! May God in His goodness be pleased to give us the spirit that animates them, a big

³Here, Saint Vincent has Jean Le Vacher in mind.

⁴The coadjutor Brothers Guillaume Servin and René Duchesne.

⁵Jean Barreau the Consul was born in Saint Jean en Grève parish, Paris, on September 26, 1612. While still young, he left the position of Parliamentary Lawyer to become a Cistercian. Later, he asked Saint Vincent to receive him into his Community and began his novitiate on May 14, 1645. In 1646 Saint Vincent sent him, while still a seminarian, to Algiers as French Consul, in keeping with the wish of the Holy See not to have a priest in the office of Consul. There his dedication to the slaves was limitless. The goodness of his heart moved him more than once to commit himself for sums he did not possess or which did not belong to him; for this he was ill-treated by local authorities and reproved by Saint Vincent. When his companion, Jacques Lesage, became gravely ill, Barreau took his vows before him, although he had not yet been released from the simple vow of religion he had taken as a Cistercian. This dispensation was not requested until 1652. Finally, on November 1, 1661, he was able to take his vows validly in the Congregation of the Mission. He was in Paris at the time, summoned by René Almérás, second Superior General, and had only Minor Orders. Barreau was ordained a priest in 1662 or 1663 and spent the remainder of his life at Saint-Lazare as Procurator. In 1672 he was associated with the Procurator General, Nicolas Talec. On May 24, 1675, during a serious illness, he made his will, to which he added a codicil on April 7, 1679. (Cf. Arch. Nat. M 213, no. 8.)

⁶According to the author of the manuscript biography of Jean Le Vacher, who reproduced part of this discourse, Saint Vincent said here: "We see how broadminded and devout he was in dignifying and supporting those wretched slaves; we have the results of it here."

heart, vast and ample! *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*;⁷ our hearts must magnify and amplify God, and may God amplify our souls for that, may He give us a broad understanding in order to be truly aware of the greatness and extent of the goodness and power of God; to know how far our obligation to serve and glorify Him in every possible manner extends; a fullness of will to embrace every opportunity to procure the glory of God. If we can do nothing of ourselves, we can do everything with God. Yes, the Mission can do anything because we have in us the seeds of the omnipotence of Jesus Christ. That's why no one can excuse himself on the grounds of his powerlessness; we'll always have greater strength than is needed, especially when the occasion arises; for, when it does, a man feels like a completely new man. That's what M. X said when he arrived; his strength was redoubled as soon as the occasion arose when he needed it.

"I almost forgot to share with the Company the news I received and for which we'll thank God. Our Holy Father the Pope has granted all Missioners a plenary indulgence at the hour of death. When M. Blatiron⁸ went to pay him the respects of the entire Company, he asked him for this grace and that of taking the Company under his protection; both were granted to him. Who can understand the fullness of this grace? A plenary indulgence at the hour of death, the application of all the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ! The result is that, at the hour of our death, we'll be clothed in that robe of innocence that will put us in the state of being pleasing in God's sight at the moment we have to give Him an account of our life. This Lord of the Gospel banishes from His presence anyone who appears before Him not wearing the wedding garment, which God will give us at the

⁷*My soul magnifies the Lord.* Cf. Lk 1:46. (NAB)

⁸Étienne Blatiron was born in Saint-Julien-Chapteuil (Haute-Loire) on January 6, 1614. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on January 6, 1638, was ordained a priest in 1639, and was placed in Alet (1639-41), Saintes (1641), Richelieu, Rome (1644-45), and Genoa (1645-57). He distinguished himself particularly in the latter post where, as Superior of a new house, he had to organize everything. Saint Vincent considered him one of his most competent Missioners and "a very great servant of God." (Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. V, p. 48.) Blatiron died in Genoa on July 24, 1657, a victim of his dedication to the plague-stricken. His biography was published in vol. II of *Notices*, pp. 151-203. In the Lyons manuscript there is a report on his virtues, addressed to Saint Vincent.

hour of death by this indulgence, if we're faithful to our vocation and live and die in the ministry in which He has placed us. This is what we're going to thank God for, the priests at Holy Mass and the Brothers at Communion; that's what we'll do today, please.

"I recommend to your prayers one of the retreatants, who has a very special need. How much good he'll do, if he's totally converted; and how much harm, if he isn't! It's enough for me to tell you that much to let you see how much he needs to be assisted."

125a. - PRIESTLY MINISTRY

To these reasons, which prove of so much interest for the welfare of poor persons and especially of the rural poor, M. Vincent joined others, drawn from the very nature and essence of the priestly ministry. He said that God expects priests to stem the tide of His indignation, and He is very pleased that, censer in hand, they place themselves, like Aaron, between Him and His people,¹ to obtain the cessation of the evils that are greatly distressing Him and which too often are the punishment of the sins he himself would not have committed if zealous Pastors had worked at his conversion.

"So then," he concluded, "it's a matter of both gratitude and justice that we must render these duties of charity to poor persons. As long as they are suffering and struggling against need and destitution, we, like Moses and following his example, must raise our arms constantly to heaven for them.² If they are suffering for their sins, we must be their intercessors with the Divine Mercy: charity obliges us to stretch out our hands to them in order to withdraw them from this; and if we don't work, even at the cost of our lives, to instruct them and to help them to be totally converted to the Lord, we are, in a certain sense, the cause of all the troubles they are enduring."

Conference 125a. - Collet, *La Vie de St Vincent*, vol. I, pp. 503-04, excerpt. The editors have inserted here this fragment from a conference, which seems to follow Conference 125.

¹Cf. Ex 4:16. (NAB)

²Cf. Ex 17:9-12. (NAB)

126. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

July 28, 1655

At the end of Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent said, "I remind the Company in general of a fault that several men are committing here in presence of Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I've noted that, when they genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, many don't go all the way to the floor, or they genuflect very irreverently. I had already noticed this at other times and had decided to remind the Company of it, but I was so wretched as to have forgotten. Since I was a little early for meditation yesterday, I watched the way some were genuflecting, and, in order to remind the Company of this and for fear of forgetting, I made a written note of it. Today I was a little early here as well, and again I noticed the same thing. In order that those who fail to genuflect reverently—as is suitable to the glory and majesty of the living God—may correct this in themselves, I felt obliged not to put off any longer reminding the Company of this, as I do now, so as to be attentive to it. By the grace of God, some make it very well and with great reverence, not only exteriorly but also interiorly; that's apparent, by the grace of God, and people notice it; some, however, make it very badly.

"The reasons that should prompt us to make this act of abasement with the exterior and interior reverence we should have, and as true Christians must do, is the example of the Son of God and of some other religious Communities. The Son of God prostrated himself with His face to the ground in the Garden of Olives; we see that the Carthusians lie full length on the floor; the Jacobins² genuflect and then make a deep bow. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed on the altar, people go down on both knees with deep humility, adoring the majesty of God.

"Another reason is the example we owe to all the persons who come to this house and who see us and observe us from head to toe.

Conference 126. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 24v

¹Subheading: The Genuflection.

²Dominicans.

They come here to recollect themselves and to learn how to live well, so many of the clergy who pass through here, the ordinands, the retreatants, who, if they see that we're satisfied to genuflect only halfway to the floor, for example, may think that they don't have to do more, and may say, 'Since those Priests of the Mission do only that, I don't have to do more, for, if they were supposed to do it, they undoubtedly would.' The men in the other houses may say, 'That's how they do it at Saint-Lazare.' And that's how everything begins to go downhill, and it's through the negligence of the Superior. You see, faults committed in a Community are imputed to the Superior, if he fails to correct them or people continue to commit them; and God will ask him for an account of this.

"I myself haven't given the example I should have. *Mais quoi!* My age and my bad legs prevent me from being able to do it. Nevertheless, if I see that the Company doesn't improve, I'll force myself to do it as best I can, so as to give the example to the Company, even if I have to get myself up by leaning my hands against the floor. Granted, this is difficult for the elderly, for, once someone has reached sixty-five or sixty-six years of age, he begins to have a hard time getting up. The infirm and those who have physical problems—men like M. Boudet, for example—have some excuse; but, as for the others, I don't know of any. They're obliged to give this example to everyone who sees and observes them.

"You see, my dear confreres, the copy is usually no better than the original; if there are defects in the original, there are usually some in the copy. The Saint-Lazare house is the original which the other houses and everyone who comes here take as an example, and on which they make copies. If, then, the original is defective, what will the copies be like?"³ *Or sus*, may God, by His holy grace, be merciful to us! I ask the Company to pay special attention to this,

³Abelly adds here (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VIII, sect. I, p. 80) two sentences that are not in our text: "So I ask you, my dear confreres, to pay close attention to this and to act in those circumstances in such a way that interior reverence always anticipates and accompanies exterior reverence. God wants to be adored in spirit and in truth, and all true Christians must conduct themselves in this way, after the example of the Son of God, who, prostrating Himself face to the ground in the Garden of Olives, accompanied this devout posture with a very profound interior abasement, out of respect for the sovereign Majesty of His Father."

and I ask M. Admirault to be alert to those who fail in it and to take note of them in order to admonish them of it afterward.

“Don’t you remember, my dear confreres, what I told you before, that someone who has learned a motet in music and then wishes to learn a second and a third finds it easier to learn the second than he did the first, and much easier to learn the third than the first or even the second? So, today we have a little difficulty performing a certain act of virtue or religion; the second time we’ll have less, and the third even less than the second, and in this way we become more and more perfect. Don’t you also recall what I told you previously? . . . *Or sus*, I won’t go any further; we’ll stop here, please.”

At that moment M. Vincent thought of some reason for not finishing what he had begun, so he concluded by recommending to the prayers of the Company those who asked him to do so and by accepting the acts of humility of a few others who had asked pardon of God for some faults they had committed.

127. - CHASTITY

July 30, 1655

“*Oh bien!* Let’s earnestly ask God for this virtue of purity, Messieurs. If we have this virtue, it will attract many others; if we don’t, both we and the Mission are lost. We have a very special need of it, since we’re constantly in circumstances where we need it. O Savior, grant us the grace of honoring that admirable purity You willed to have on earth!

“Tomorrow we celebrate the feast of a great saint, Saint Ignatius, who had this virtue to a very high degree and passed it on to that great, holy Company he instituted. At the beginning of that Company, everyone admired the young men living among them in great purity, although they were continually in dangerous circumstances.

One day someone asked one of their priests what they were doing to preserve such great purity; he replied that they carried with them something that preserved them: sobriety and custody of the exterior senses. May God in His goodness be pleased to give us a share in that spirit He has spread so abundantly in that holy Company!

“Let’s strive to imitate it in its sobriety and custody of the senses and to use the other means that have been mentioned to maintain ourselves in great purity. But the greatest means is to turn frequently to Our Lord in every circumstance and at every moment; turn to Our Lord and have great devotion to His purity and that of the Blessed Virgin. Let’s ask Him for this grace; I feel that, if we beg Him earnestly for it, He’ll have mercy on us. All the priests who have no special obligation will celebrate Mass tomorrow for this intention; the Brothers won’t be receiving Communion tomorrow, but they’ll ask God for this on Sunday and will offer their Communion that God may be pleased to give this precious gift to the Company. How edified I was recently by one of our Brothers, living among savages, about whom someone wrote me: men and women go about almost naked; he works among them and sees all that. But what am I saying? He doesn’t presume to see it, he doesn’t look at them, and thus he’s free of impurity. *O Sauveur!* Recently I had the report of this shown to the Ladies of Charity, and they were all moved with consolation at seeing what powerful assistance God gives in such circumstances. This is what we’ll ask of God, please, through the intercession of Our Lady, Saint Joseph, our Guardian Angels, Saint Peter, and Saint Ignatius.”

128. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 1, 1655

At the end of Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent took the opportunity of speaking of the fact that a coadjutor Brother on duty in the pantry had knelt down and asked pardon of God for talking very loud and for not correcting himself of this. "It's true," M. Vincent then said, "that there's a lot of noise in that pantry, so much so that it disturbs those nearby and prevents them from hearing the reading. Even though attention has been called to this, there's been no improvement; and, what is worse, when someone knocks to summon you, you don't answer; you turn a deaf ear. Brother, that's a great fault. Correct it, Brother.

"I don't know where all the noise we make comes from or why we have so little silence among us now. In the beginning of the Company, silence was better observed, and people spoke more softly than we do now. This has come about because someone among us is hard of hearing, and we've had to speak louder to make ourselves understood; so we've continued to speak in a loud tone of voice. We have to admit that there's been a great falling off in that area in our conversations and that people are talking very loud. All that's my fault, for I alone am guilty of whatever's wrong in the Company; I myself speak too loudly and give this bad example to the Company, and I don't see that this is corrected.

"I think Saint Benedict says that the first step in humility is silence, silence. *Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion*,² and a Doctor of the Church³ has expressed this verse as *Te decet silentium, Deus, in Sion*.⁴ We've seen ordinations, where fifty or sixty men are be-

Conference 128. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 25v.

¹Subheading: Keeping silence, conversing with moderation at recreation, example of retreatants, the Court, the nobility, the Sorbonne. What the first members of the Company do will be imitated by those who come after them; examples of Rechab and Adam.

²A hymn of praise we owe to you in Sion, O God. Cf. Ps 65:2. (NAB)

³Saint Jerome.

⁴To you in Sion, O God, we owe silence.

ing ordained, carried out without any noise. At the Collège des Bons-Enfants, for example, where, in the beginning, we received the ordinands, we saw all that take place in that little, confined space in marvelous silence. By the grace of God, some in the Company give great example in this; oh yes, there are some—many, in fact—by the grace of God!

“Some time ago there was a good Doctor, now dead, who had the custom of coming every year to make his retreat in this house, and I always had the honor of serving him. One day, when he was making his communication⁵ to me, I asked him what his predominant passion was. He thought for a while and then replied, ‘You’re giving me a lot to think about, Monsieur; my reply, however, is that those of us from the North are very little subject to passions—not that we don’t have a few, but not generally speaking.’

“And, in fact, since that time I’ve been on the watch and have seen from experience that what he told me is true, namely, that persons from the North are much less prone to allowing themselves to be carried away by passion and fits of anger, and that those from the South and the warmer countries are more so. So you see that, in certain cities—in Constantinople, for example—there are members of the civil administration, that is, people who go through the entire city, into the markets and fairs, with constables and sergeants, to visit and note those who speak too loudly and make too much noise, just as you see those deputized merchants in Paris who go from shop to shop, and if they find someone who has lost his temper and is talking too loudly, with no other kind of trial they immediately make him stretch out on the pavement, where he’s beaten with a stick twenty or thirty times. Now, those people, the Turks, do what they do as a matter of policy; with what greater reason must we do it, as a matter of virtue.

“One resolution, among others, that this good Doctor I just mentioned took during his retreat, was to try to imitate in a certain respect another Doctor of the Sorbonne, now a Bishop, who gives

⁵A spiritual exercise in which a person, outside of the confessional, discusses with his/her director the state of his/her soul and the efforts to be made to strive for perfection.

very good example. He's also a Prelate endowed with a very high degree of virtue, whom I used to see every day and with whom I used to converse.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ is the true model and that great invisible portrait on whom we must fashion all our actions. The most perfect men living here below on earth are the visible, tangible pictures who serve as models for us to regulate all our actions well and make them pleasing to God.

"I wish you could see, Messieurs, the silence there is at the Louvre and the way people talk to one another. You'd sometimes see forty, fifty, eighty, or a hundred persons there waiting, talking with one another in a low voice, with the result that you could hear a pin drop at the other end of the room. In the residence of the late Cardinal Richelieu, where I've been many times, there was a marvelous silence; and in the residence of the present one⁶ also you see everyone speaking politely, respectfully, and reservedly with one another.

"If you could only see how those Doctors of the Sorbonne take their recreation together; it's so beautiful! They have a pathway where they walk in threes and fours, speaking cordially, quietly, and respectfully to one another. As for me, I must confess that I don't know why our recreations are going so badly, seeing that this is contrary to polite conversation, common courtesy, and even common sense. Our student confreres are the most guilty in this, and I myself first of all, for not giving the good example I should.

"People ask how it is that, in the Parlement, some Chambers have a better reputation than others, and no other reason is given than the fact that, since the Chief Justices and Councillors of those

⁶Jules Cardinal Mazarin (Giulio Mazarini) was born in Pescina in the Abruzzi (Italy) in 1602, studied in Spain as a youth, and served in the papal army and the papal diplomatic corps. He met Richelieu in 1630 and represented the Pope in negotiating the peace of Cherasco with France in 1631. Mazarin had hardly begun preparing for the priesthood—he received tonsure in 1632, but never became a priest—when he was assigned to other important diplomatic posts: Vice-Legate of Avignon (1634), then Nuncio in France (1635-36), in which positions he demonstrated the ability and flexibility of the most subtle statesman. He became a French citizen in 1639, and Richelieu obtained a Cardinal's hat for him in 1641. Before Richelieu's death (1642), he recommended Mazarin to Louis XIII. He became the principal minister of Queen Anne of Austria during the regency of Louis XIV (1643-61) and, until his own death in 1661, was the absolute master of France.

Chambers started out right and established a way of treating affairs in a sound manner and with all possible knowledge, the others who followed them preserved this same spirit and jurisprudence and passed it on to those who came after them, and these latter to those who have followed them. In this way that high regard and reputation continued and has been preserved until now.

“Rechab slept in a tent and never drank wine. When his children saw that, they said, ‘Our father sleeps only in a tent and drinks no wine; why shouldn’t we do likewise? Are we better than he? He’s given us this example; why shouldn’t we benefit from it?’ They did, and their children in turn said, ‘Our fathers acted that way; we have to imitate them.’⁷ And so, from generation to generation, for the space of three hundred years, the children of Rechab kept that custom, which pleased God so much that it’s said in Holy Scripture that he blessed Rechab’s family. So, my dear confreres, you see what good example can do and how important it is in the beginning to lay a firm foundation and set a good example on which those who follow us can build.

“Oh, what a strict account I’ll have to render to God, I who am not giving the Company the example I should! And what I say of myself must be understood also of all those who are the oldest members of the Company; for not only will we be guilty of the harm we’re doing personally, but we’ll be guilty likewise and will render an account to God of the harm that those who come after us will do because of our having left them neither the example we should nor the manner of behaving and of doing things as is suitable for true Missioners, and as the Rules and holy customs of the Company require of us, if we don’t do penance for this.

“So, we see that the sin Adam committed has passed into all his children, even down to ourselves, and will do the same to those who come after us. And if Adam hadn’t done penance for his sin and for the bad example he gave to all his posterity, not only would he have been punished for his personal fault but also for the faults his children and all his posterity would have committed because of him.

⁷Cf Jer 35 (NAB)

“On the other hand, how many good works and holy acts of virtue will be due to the good members of the Company who have laid a firm foundation and given good example! For, in the measure that those who follow them do good and maintain themselves on the right path they traced out for them, their glory will increase and they’ll receive their reward for this from God in heaven. Shouldn’t that encourage all of us, brothers, to begin anew, from now on, to make good progress, to be exact in the practice of the Rules and holy customs of the Company, to keep silence, and to adopt a way of conversing with one another that’s as pleasing to God as we can imagine? Let’s ask this grace of Our Lord and receive Communion for that intention today.”

129.- REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 4, 1655

“I have an admonition for our Brothers in the seminary. I have a piece of advice to give them today so that they’ll know how to act in those matters (of which it had just been a question). It’s certain that, when charity dwells in a soul, it takes full possession of all its powers: it gives it no rest; it’s a fire that’s constantly active; once a person is inflamed by it, it holds him spellbound. *O Sauveur!* The memory wants to remember nothing but God; it holds in horror all other thoughts, considering them bothersome and rejecting them. Only those that bring to mind His well-beloved can please it. His presence must, at all costs—it absolutely must—be made continually close.

“There are the eager desires of the understanding, a pressing effort to see and discover new means to have this presence. Those aren’t good; others are needed; if I could practice that, I’d have it; it has to be done; but I still have this devotion; how can I harmonize it with that one? It doesn’t matter, both are necessary. And even if he

Conference 129. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 89.

¹Subheading: Excesses to be avoided in the love of God.

adopts that new devotion, he seeks others, and yet others. That poor person takes on everything and, for all that, isn't content. He goes beyond his strength, is left weighed down by this, and thinks he never has enough of them. O gentle Savior, how will this end? The will is all caught up in it and is obliged to produce such frequent acts that it can't do them; they're acts upon acts repeated, redoubled at all times and places—at recreation, in the refectory—you see these men all excited; they think of nothing else; they don't let up, even in gatherings and conversations. In a word, here, there, and everywhere there's nothing but ardor, fire, and flames, continual acts. They're always beside themselves.

"What danger and risks there are in those excesses, those eager desires, and those fits of enthusiasm! *Mais quoi!* Is there any risk in loving God? Can we love Him too much? Can there be any excess in something so holy and divine? Can we ever have sufficient love for God, who is infinitely loveable? It's true that we can never love God enough and can never go to excess in this love if we consider what God deserves from us. O Savior God, who could rise to that amazing love You show us, even to shedding for us wretched creatures all Your blood, of which a single drop is infinitely priceless! O Savior! No, Messieurs, that can't be; no matter what we do, we could never love God as we should; that's impossible; God is infinitely loveable. Still, we have to be very careful that, even though God commands us to love Him with all our heart and with all our strength, His Goodness doesn't, however, want us to go so far as to damage and ruin our health by these acts; no, no! God doesn't ask us to kill ourselves for that.

"A few men in the seminary—three or four—caught up and inflamed with this desire, attached such importance to constantly producing acts day and night, always straining themselves, that poor human nature was unable to withstand such violent action. In that state, the blood becomes heated and, burning up with such ardor, sends hot vapors to the brain, which soon catches fire; this is followed by dizziness and pressure, as if they were wearing a blindfold; the organs become weak and many other difficulties ensue. We become absolutely useless for the rest of our days, and all we do is languish until death, which we bring on much sooner.

“We think all that is desirable and that it’s good to be reduced to that state by the love we have for God. Dying like that seems the most beautiful way to go; it’s to die of love, to be a martyr—a martyr of love. It seems that those blessed souls can apply to themselves the words of the Spouse and say with her: *Vulnerasti cor meum*;² it’s You, my loving God, who have wounded me; You’re the one who has broken and pierced my heart with Your burning arrows; You’re the one who put this sacred fire in my inmost being, causing me to die of love. Oh, may You be forever blessed! O Savior, *vulnerasti cor meum*!

“Among the sacrifices offered to God in the Old Law, holocaust was the most excellent one because, in recognition of the sovereignty of God, the victim was burned and consumed entirely on the altars, without saving anything. Everything was reduced to dust and ashes for the glory of God. I think we could call those souls victims of love–holocausts–since, without holding anything back for themselves, they are consumed and perish because of it. *O Dieu!* How glorious it is to die like that and what a privilege it is to die of such beautiful wounds!

“Nevertheless, we still have to be very careful about that: there’s a great deal of danger in it and many mishaps; it’s better—much better—not to get so excited but to restrain yourself, without bursting your brains trying to make this virtue perceptible and almost natural; for, in the end, after all those vain efforts, you have to let go, you have to loosen your grip; and take care, watch out that you don’t end up growing completely weary and falling into a state worse than the one in which you were, into the worst condition of all and from which one scarcely ever rises. Saint Paul says that it’s impossible for someone who has once loved and tasted the sweetness of devotion, and then lost an appreciation for it and grew weary of it, to be able to recover it.³ When he says that this is impossible, he’s saying that it’s extremely difficult and almost requires a miracle.

²You have ravished my heart. Cf. Sng 4:9. (NAB)

³Cf. Heb 6:4-6. (NAB)

“That, then, is very often what you get for worrying so much, that’s what you get; that’s what you get for trying to make virtue perceptible to yourself: a distaste for all sorts of devotions, for virtue, and for the holiest things, and only with the greatest difficulty and trouble do you get over it. *O Sauveur!* What usually happens to those persons who torture themselves and do serious damage to their health is that, becoming ill—which always happens, for such great constraint ends in that—and, despite the fact that they have to slacken off, there’s no other way to keep up the large number of acts they were producing daily; so, three or four suffice; and if they used to do fifty, they can do only one or two—or even none at all. They have to refrain from them completely until they’re back on their feet, if—which rarely happens—they can even do that, for, as a rule, they’re crippled by this for the rest of their days, along with all that ensues.

“You have to be very careful about all that. I entreat the Directors to pay very close attention to it. It happens in the beginning: when you start to taste the sweetness of devotion, you can’t get enough of it, you think you never have enough, and you plunge too deeply into it. ‘Oh! I must constantly have this presence of God, I must cling to it.’ We’re at its mercy; it gets a grip on us; we’re bound to it by such invincible persistency that we make ourselves ill over it, as we said a little while ago. Oh, it’s too much, too much!

“Very often that’s how the devil tempts us; when he can’t induce us directly to do evil, he prompts us to try to take on more good than we’re able to do and keeps overloading us until we’re overwhelmed by a weight that’s excessive and by such a heavy burden.

“Virtue always lies in the middle, my dear confreres; each virtue has two vicious extremes; no matter from which side we happen to move away, we fall into one of these faults; for our actions to be praiseworthy, we have to walk a straight line between those two extremes. For example, the charity we mentioned has its two extremes, which are bad, namely, to love little or not at all, and to love too ardently and passionately. Never to think of that, nor to make any act of it or to do it rarely is a lack of concern; it’s laziness regarding charity, which is never idle; but also to perform acts that

heat up our blood and drive us crazy is to go to excess in this matter and to fall into the other vicious extreme. Virtue lies in the middle; the extremes are never worth anything.

“So then, I ask M. [Delespincy],⁴ who’s in charge of the seminary, to be attentive to this at communications; yes, Monsieur, please keep an eye out for this and see to it that they don’t change for the worse; those that are too fervent must be given moderation for fear that they may go to excess; those who, under the pretext of not inconveniencing themselves, have no fervor at all and make no acts must be prodded and awakened a little; they mustn’t fall into indifference and become lax. Now, these mental strains usually come from an immoderate desire to make progress, from self-love and ignorance, and because people want to make virtues and spiritual matters felt tangibly. They try to rise from the first step to an eminent degree of virtue. They don’t understand the frailty of our nature and the weakness of our bodies, and they undertake things beyond their strength. From this it happens that poor human nature, which is stifled and hampered, complains, cries out, and obliges us to give in. We have to make provision for the necessities of nature, since God has made us subject to them, and adapt to its weakness. That’s what God wills; He’s so good and just that He asks for nothing more; He’s well aware of our woes and, in His compassion and mercy, supplies for our defects. We must act very simply with Him and not be so anxious about this; His goodness and mercy will provide whatever we need.

“I remember something the Bishop of Geneva⁵ said on this topic—divine words, worthy of such a great man: ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I wouldn’t want to go to God, if God didn’t come to me!’ Such admirable words! He wouldn’t want to go to God, if God didn’t first come to him. Words like these come from a heart perfectly enlightened in the science of love! That being so, a heart truly filled with charity, which understands what it is to love God, wouldn’t want to

⁴Gabriel Delespincy. Born in Grandchamp (Calvados), entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 5, 1645, and took his vows on January 25, 1656; he was Superior in Toul (1648-52) and Marseilles (1659-60).

⁵Saint Francis de Sales.

go to God unless God anticipated him and attracted him by His grace. That's a far cry from wanting to carry God away and draw Him to himself by hook or by crook. No, no; in those cases, nothing is gained by force.

"When God wants to communicate himself, He does it effortlessly, in a perceptible, very pleasant, gentle, loving way; so, let's ask Him often and with great confidence for this gift of meditation. On His part, God asks for nothing better; let's pray to Him, but let's do it with great confidence, and be assured that, in His great mercy, He'll grant it to us in the end. He never refuses when people pray to Him humbly and confidently. If He doesn't grant it in the beginning, He does so later on. We have to persevere and not become discouraged; and if we don't have that spirit of God now, in His mercy He'll give it to us if we're steadfast—perhaps in three or four months, more or less, or in a year or two. Whatever happens, let's be resigned to His Providence, hoping entirely in His generosity and allowing God to act; let's always be very courageous. When God in His goodness grants a certain grace to someone, what the person considered difficult becomes so easy that he finds pleasure in the very thing he used to find so hard; in fact, he's truly quite amazed by this unexpected change. *Hic est digitus Dei, haec mutatio dexteræ Excelsi*.⁶ That's when we have no difficulty feeling that we're in the presence of God; it becomes almost natural and never ceases; we even have great satisfaction in it. We mustn't force ourselves or try to form specific words interiorly, tying our stomach in knots. God understands quite well without our speaking to Him; He sees the deepest motivations of our heart; He's aware of even our slightest feelings.

"O Savior, to reveal our needs to You, all we have to do is to open our mouths; You hear the softest sigh, the slightest movement of our soul, and by a gentle, loving impulse we draw down on ourselves more incomparable graces and blessings than by those extreme acts of violence. O Savior, You know what my heart wants to

⁶According to Fr. Dodin (*op. cit.*, no. 52, p. 179), Saint Vincent is using here parts of two citations from the Old Testament. "The magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God'" (Ex 8:15), and " . . . that the right hand of the Most High is changed." (Ps 77:11).

say; it turns to You, fountain of mercy; You see its desires; they tend only to You, they aspire only to You, they want only You. Let's say to Him often, *Doce nos orare*; ⁷ give us, Lord this gift of meditation; teach us yourself how we should pray. This is what we ask of Him today and every day with confidence—great confidence—in His goodness.”

130. - POVERTY

August 6, 1655

“This topic is so important that I think it advisable to continue it the next time; we'll discuss it again next Friday, and we have reason to hope from the goodness of God, who acts in accord with the disposition of His subjects, that He'll give us even greater graces; for, as we've just said, it's poverty that must maintain us. What will become of the Company if attachment to worldly goods infiltrates it? What will become of it? The saints tell us that poverty is the crux of religious Orders. We're not religious; it was expedient for us not to be. We're unworthy of being religious, even though we live in Community; but we can say that poverty is the crux of Communities and especially of ours, which has greater need of it than others. It's this bond that frees it from all earthly things and attaches it to its God. O Savior, give us this virtue, which attaches us inseparably to Your service, so that we may neither want nor seek anything but You alone and Your glory! *Or sus*, blessed be God!

“Now, the poverty we profess is a simple vow we take to give up worldly goods in order to serve God, to live in common, and to have nothing of our own. This must be understood with regard to use; those who have benefices renounce them, and those who have other property either give it up or leave to the Superior the disposition of the fruits derived from it, and all live in common. Thus, some don't

⁷*Teach us to pray.* Cf. Lk 11:1. (NAB)

have more than others. Although there are some who have possessions, they don't have personal use of them, even though they retain possession of the capital. Should it unfortunately happen that they lose this spirit and want to leave the post where God has placed them, they resume the enjoyment of their property and income when they leave, after the Pope or the Superior has dispensed them from the vow. Blessed be God! It's true that, if they die in the Mission—be it here, or in the Indies, or elsewhere—they have the disposition of their goods as something belonging to them personally and may do whatever they wish with them, leaving them to whomever they please, without the permission of the Superior. This right that a person has over his patrimony and over any inheritance doesn't prevent us from living in holy poverty.

"If we have property, we don't have the use of it, and that makes us like Jesus Christ, who, having all things, had nothing. He was the Master and Lord of the whole world. He made the goods that are in it; yet, He willed, for love of us, to deprive himself of their use; even though He was Lord of the whole world, He made himself the poorest of all men and even had less than the smallest animals: *Vulpes foveas habent; volucres caeli, nidos; Filius autem hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet*,¹ but the Son of God does not have a stone on which to rest His head. *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* What will become of us if we attach ourselves to the goods of this earth? What will become of us after the example of the poverty of the Son of God? Ah, may those who have possessions not desire the use of them if they have renounced them; and may those who have none not want to have them!

"In the beginning of the Church, all those who wanted to become priests renounced their possessions: *Dominus pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei*.² A priest must renounce everything in order to have God alone—You alone, O Savior! Isn't that enough? Isn't that only right? Should he be thinking about anything else? *Dominus pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei*.

¹*Foxes have dens, the birds of the sky have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.* Cf. Mt 8:20. (NAB)

²*The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup.* Cf. Ps 15:5. (D-RB)

“So, in the beginning, a man embraced poverty in order to become a priest; there were very few priests, only those who were needed, as many as there were benefices. And, when a priest happened to die, the person chosen for the benefice took Orders, with the result that very often men were appointed before they became priests. In the end, however, it was judged advisable and expedient—even necessary—to have more priests. That’s why, even though a man might not have a benefice, he was admitted to Orders with a patrimonial title, and in this way, the number of priests increased. Now, this title varies according to the place, or at least the Bishops have required more in one place than in another. In Paris, fifty écus are required; elsewhere it’s one hundred, and in other places eighty suffice. There are some that are satisfied with fifty livres, more or less.³

“In the beginning, then, priests took a sort of vow of poverty—even Saint Basil, Saint Jerome, and others I can’t recall. So, the saints, the first Christians, not only the priests but all the others embraced poverty. *O Sauveur!* All the first Christians took the vow of poverty, *nec quisquam eorum quae possidebat aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant illis omnia communia*,⁴ none of them considered what he owned as belonging to him personally, but everything was in common among them; they sold their possessions and laid the money they received for them at the feet of the Apostles, who then distributed it to each one according to his need. We even see that someone who was tempted to divest himself of all his goods was severely punished by Saint Peter, who carried out an act of justice, causing Ananias to die, and his wife shortly after him, having them put to death at his feet by the power of God that was in him; and by the authority it gave him, he punished them on the spot.⁵ Saint Basil and Saint Jerome, basing themselves on the fact that Saint Peter performed an act of justice by having Ananias and his wife killed at his

³Throughout this edition the various denominations of money have been left in French, since no adequate, unchanging value in American dollars can be assigned. In the time of Saint Vincent, one écu equaled three livres; one thousand livres could support two priests and a Brother for one year on the missions (cf. V, 485).

⁴*No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.* Cf. Acts 4:32 (NAB)

⁵Cf. Acts 5:1-11, (NAB)

feet before everyone in the whole Church, assure us that the first Christians took a sort of vow of poverty.

“What a happiness for the Mission to be able to imitate the first Christians and, like them, to live in common and in poverty! *O Sauveur!* What a benefit for us! Let’s all ask God to give us in His mercy His spirit of poverty. Yes, the spirit of poverty is the spirit of God; for to despise what God despises and value what He values, to seek what He approves and to be attached to what He loves, is to have the spirit of God, which is nothing else than to have the same desires and affections of God, to adopt the sentiments of God. This is what the spirit of God is: to love like Him and His followers the poverty to which the spirit of the world is opposed, that spirit of ownership and ease that seeks its own satisfaction, that spirit of attachment to the things of this earth, that spirit of the antichrist—yes, of the antichrist—not of that antichrist who is to come shortly before Our Lord, but of that spirit of wealth opposed to God, and those maxims contrary to the ones the Son of God taught.

“*Or sus*, courage! Let’s avoid that spirit of damnation and ask God to give us His spirit, which is the spirit of poverty. Let’s ask Him to preserve it in us; for, it has always been present in the Little Company, thank God—that spirit of abandonment of all things, which causes us to leave everything for God, which detaches us from comforts, times, and places, here and in the Indies. Yes, by the grace of God, it’s present in the Mission. A man is going a hundred leagues away: ‘When are you leaving for that place a hundred leagues from here, Monsieur?’ ‘Today or tomorrow, even this morning.’ Men go just as easily to Rome four hundred leagues away.

“O Savior, it’s Your spirit that does this; You’re the one who gave this spirit to the Mission. In thirty years I don’t think I’ve found more than one man who refused to go here or there; no, I haven’t. Blessed be God! But what are those men looking for who always want to possess things and never have enough, no matter what they have? What are they looking for? I know very well: they want to enjoy themselves to the full. Shall I say it? . . . We’ll have to think about that.

“Goods are called means because people don’t want them just for the sake of having them but in order to get something else; those who

seek them want to pass the time, enjoy themselves, have things the way they like, raise themselves up. *O Sauveur!* Is that being a Missioner? Is that the spirit of the Mission? No, no; the latter is founded on poverty; and whoever has this spirit has everything; he can do anything; he fears nothing; and God, who never fails those who have left all for Him, increases their strength when they need it; He also gives renewed strength, as M. Mousnier,⁶ who is in Madagascar and gives me news of this, tells me.

“My dear confreres, let’s all ask God for this spirit, that He’ll separate us from all worldly goods in order to unite us to himself. Together, let’s all please ask Him for this spirit, without which it’s impossible to live in Community. Let’s pray for this during the coming week; perhaps, by His grace, He’ll inspire someone on Friday, who will come to enkindle in us this spirit of poverty. Let’s try this week to find the means of obtaining it. O gentle Savior, give it to us; we entreat You yourself to grant us this spirit, which will cause us to seek only You alone. It comes from You, it depends on You, so we most humbly entreat You to give it to us. Ah, Messieurs! Let’s be earnest in asking Him for it; if we have it, we’ll have everything, and we’ll be happy if we die in this spirit. What an honor, what happiness, and what glory to die like the Son of God died! Is there any greater benefit? Could we desire a better or more glorious end? That’s how we’ll die, if we live in the spirit of poverty. We must hope for this from the infinite goodness of God.

“Friday we’ll continue with this same topic, *in nomine Domini*.”

⁶Jean-François Mousnier, born in Saintes (Charente-Maritime), entered the Congregation of the Mission on December 19, 1643, at eighteen years of age, took his vows on January 1, 1646, and was ordained a priest in 1649. After distributing alms in Picardy, he was sent to Madagascar, where he died in 1655. His biography is published in vol. III of *Notices*, pp. 129-46.

131. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 10, 1655

“There’s an important matter, of which the outcome is uncertain, that I recommend to the prayers of the Company. We’ll please offer it to Our Lord, that it may please Him in His mercy to give it His blessing.”

M. Vincent also recommended to the prayers of the Company Messrs. Mousnier and Bourdaise, who, he said, are on the island of Madagascar and are daily exposed to new dangers, that God in His mercy may be pleased to give them the spirit of Saint Lawrence² and help them, like this great saint, to be steadfast to the end and to overcome all the difficulties that may arise.

He also recommended many other persons to the prayers of the Company, among others one of the retreatants, saying, “I entreat you, my dear confreres, to thank God for making so many persons feel drawn to make a retreat here; it’s wonderful: the many clergy from town and country who leave everything for it; the many persons who ask every day to be admitted and insistently request this far in advance! What a great reason to praise God! Some come to me and say, ‘Monsieur, I’ve been asking for this favor for a long time; I’ve come here so many times without being able to obtain it.’ Others say, ‘Monsieur, I have to go away; I have responsibilities; my benefice requires my presence, I’m on the point of departure, grant me this favor.’ Still others say, ‘I’ve completed my studies and have to withdraw and reflect on what I should become.’ Yet others say, ‘Monsieur, I really need this; if you only knew, you’d soon grant me this favor.’

“What a great favor! What a great grace God has bestowed on this house, to call so many souls to it for the holy exercises of a retreat and to use this family as an instrument for the instruction of

Conference 131. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 96, Repetition of Prayer.

¹Subheading: Retreat Ministry.

²August 10, the day this conference was given, was the feast of St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr.

those poor souls! What else should we think about but winning a soul to God, especially when the person comes to us! We should have no other intention and should aim only at that, and that alone. Alas! Those souls have cost the Son of God so much, and it's to us that He sends them to restore them to His grace. O Messieurs, let's be careful not to make ourselves unworthy of this lest God withdraw His hand from over us. It does happen that some get no benefit at all from it; they come because they have to and only for their own comfort, but, for the few who don't make good use of it, this shouldn't make us grow tired of helping the others; we mustn't penalize so many good souls who benefit greatly from it. What good results, what marvelous results! I've already told you that; today I'm only going to give you an example.

"On the last journey to Brittany I took five years ago, as soon as I arrived there a very upright man came to thank me for the grace he said he received in making the retreat here. 'Monsieur,' he said, 'I would have been lost without it; I owe you everything because it gave me peace of mind and helped me to adopt a way of life that I continue to live, by the grace of God and to my greatest satisfaction. Ah, Monsieur! I'm so indebted to you for this that I talk about it everywhere, in all the gatherings in which I find myself; I tell people that, without the retreat I made, thanks to you, at Saint-Lazare, I would have been damned. O Monsieur, how grateful I am to you!' That delights me.

"How unfortunate we'll be if, through our own laziness, we force God to take this grace away from us! To tell the truth, not everyone benefits from it in that way, but isn't the kingdom of God composed of the good and the bad? It's a net that takes in all kinds of fish, good and bad; for all the favors God grants, there are persons who abuse them; nevertheless, that doesn't stop Him from granting them. How many there are who have been unwilling to benefit from the passion and death of Our Lord! O gentle, merciful Savior, You see that most people don't appreciate them, and yet You still died, even though You saw that multitude of unbelievers who make light of them, and that great number among us who despise and trample underfoot Your Precious Blood. There's no good

work they don't profane, nothing so holy that they don't abuse it; but for all that and for all these abuses we must never withdraw from them on the pretext that some people make poor use of them; we mustn't become lax and grow cold in our spiritual exercises just because everyone doesn't benefit from them. What a loss and what a misfortune if we should weary of that grace God has given us over all other Communities and deprive God of the glory He draws from it! What a misfortune! Woe betide me and woe betide the man who, through his laziness, the fear of losing his comfort, or his love for having a good time when he should be working, will diminish the fervor of this holy practice! No matter what happens through the fault of certain people, however, we must never grow lax. Let's always be very courageous; God, who gave us this grace, will maintain it in us and even give us greater ones. Let's have greater hope, be stouthearted in the face of difficulties, and have unwavering courage. Only that cursed spirit of laziness gives up at the smallest contradiction; there's not the slightest discomfort it doesn't avoid, no responsibility it doesn't fear, no satisfaction it doesn't seek; this self-love ruins everything. Let's banish this cowardice far from us; let's ask God in His mercy to preserve for us what he has so generously granted us; it's a great gift He has given to the Company; let's ask His Goodness that we may not make ourselves unworthy of it by our carelessness; let's pray fervently to Him.

"O Savior, create in us that spirit of Saint Lawrence which caused him to triumph amid the flames of the rage of all hell; create in our hearts that divine fire and ardent fervor that will cause us to triumph over all the obstacles of the devil and of our evil nature, which may oppose what is good; stir up in us an ardent zeal to procure Your glory in all our ministries so that we may persevere constantly in them until death, after the example of that great saint whose feast we are celebrating. We beg this of you through his intercession."

132. - POVERTY

August 13, 1655

“It’s difficult, Messieurs, to have a clear idea of the importance of the virtue of holy poverty. It’s the support of Communities; the Holy Fathers say that it’s the fortress wall of all religious Orders; it’s their rampart; it’s what defends and preserves them.

“Would to God, Messieurs, that we could conceive clearly today how important it is for us and how necessary it is that we have great love for holy poverty! O Savior, please give us a share in Your insights so that we might know and love this virtue. Ah, if we could discover its beauty, if God were to do us the favor of showing it to us, who among us would not feel his heart inflamed by the desire to have it? Who would not love to be poor?

“Now, Messieurs, this evening we’ll conclude the conference on poverty as we profess it as a simple vow; some other time, if the opportunity presents itself, we’ll be able to discuss it in greater detail as a remarkable virtue; for this virtue encompasses many others, and there are also several vices that wage war against it; for this evening, however, as I was thinking of what should lead us to an exact practice of poverty, this is what popped into my head: namely, that we’ve given our word on it to the Superior. We’ve promised to keep it very strictly. It’s with that intention that we came here; it’s on that condition that we were admitted; we’ve pledged our word on this to the Superior; we’ve made it an obligation; the promise is made. Isn’t it true, my dear confreres, isn’t it true that this was explained to you when you came, and you were told, ‘See if you can adopt this practice and can keep holy poverty exactly. Ponder this; think about it.’ You took the time to do that; you thought about it before God; you made a resolution about it in His presence; I’m not speaking about the fact that you promised it to God, we’ll talk about that a little later. So then, having really given it serious thought, you felt you could do it, and you said, ‘Yes, Monsieur, I do want this, with the grace of God, and I

promise you to observe holy poverty everywhere and in all things.’ That’s what you voluntarily committed yourself to do after holy, serious reflection. Isn’t it true, my dear confreres, that this is what happened and that, when the Superior saw that you had made up your mind to do it, he then admitted you?

“Would you want now to break your promise and go back on your word, which men of the world keep so religiously, and without which a man isn’t a man? Yes, a man who doesn’t keep his word isn’t a man, he has only the appearance of one, but he’s an animal, a wild animal, that deserves to be driven from the society of men. *O Sauveur!* What is a man who doesn’t keep his word? He’s the worst—yes the worst, the most despicable—of all men. In fact, the world itself, which puts up with all sorts of wickedness, can’t tolerate that one. The man who doesn’t keep his word once he has given it is detestable before God and others. God treats such people as His enemies and as wicked souls; yes, that’s how God treats those who fail to keep their word, even in worldly matters: *Declinantes in obligationes adducet Dominus cum operantibus iniquitatem, adducet cum operantibus iniquitatem.*¹ He’ll put people like that, who make no account of their promises, in the rank of sinners; He’ll chastise like sins their failure to keep their word. *Adducet cum operantibus iniquitatem.* O Savior! If those who don’t keep their word in worldly matters are treated so severely, how then are those who fail to keep their word in such a holy matter treated? How are those who fail in the obligation they’ve accepted to observe holy poverty treated, Messieurs? O Savior, if You punish in the same way as sin the failure to keep one’s word in earthly matters or worldly things, which You prize so little and which are as nothing in Your sight, how harsh will Your punishment be against those who fail to keep their word in regard to holy poverty, the virtue that concerns You, that belongs to You, that’s proper to You? In what place will

¹ But those who turn aside to crooked ways, may the Lord send down with the wicked, send down with the wicked. Cf. Ps 125.5 (NAB). But such as turn aside into bonds, the Lord shall lead out with the workers of iniquity, he shall lead them out with the workers of iniquity. Cf. Ps. 124.5 (D-RB)

they be? Where will You put them? Ah, Savior! No doubt, in the lowest place of all, in the most shameful that can be imagined.

“Let’s fear, Messieurs, let’s fear going back on the word we’ve given the Superior regarding holy poverty. You know, Messieurs, when a man has failed to keep his word in the world, he’s dishonored forever; it’s a disgrace for him that he can’t efface. What a reason for being ashamed! He carries his reproach with him everywhere; he takes his torturer wherever he goes; everyone looks on him with scorn; they point him out, saying, ‘Look! There’s that liar, that deceiver, that imposter! After giving me his word, he hasn’t kept it at all! Look at that trickster who came to my own house to promise me something, then made a mockery of it and broke his word; look at that good-for-nothing, insincere man! What an unparalleled insulting person!’

“Now, if this is said rightly among men about someone who’s careless about keeping his promises, what should be said when someone among us fails to keep the word he gave to the Superior regarding such holy things, both for the glory of God and for his eternal salvation? What must be said about that? But what shouldn’t people say about it? What shame should an insincere man who has betrayed the Company not have! What greater disgrace than to have gone back on his word! I don’t think there’s anyone like that among us, unworthy of any society; no, by the grace of God, I don’t know of any. That’s the first reason that must lead us to love holy poverty, the word we’ve given to the Superior, and, if we don’t keep it, we’re disgraced forever, becoming the vilest man of all. A man who doesn’t keep his word is a . . .

“I say even more: we’ve taken a vow of poverty. I’ve put forth as the first reason that we’ve made a promise to the Superior. Now, in the second place, I say that we’ve also promised it to God; we gave our word to God himself, solemnly declaring that we’d observe holy poverty religiously. To make a promise to God! *O Sauveur!* If we’re so strictly obliged to do what we’ve promised to a man—the Superior—what an obligation we have, my dear confreres, to do what we’ve promised to a God! How great it is! Who can understand it? To have pledged our word to God—to a God! To have given our word

to a God whose majesty is immense! Who among angels or men can conceive of the extent of this obligation! And to break it, to fail in it, to make a mockery of it! *O Sauveur!* Of what punishments do we not make ourselves worthy!

"If it's intolerable to be called a deceiver by a man of the world, what will it be when all men, all the angels, and all creatures reproach us for our betrayal? What will it be like when God himself says to us, 'Oh, there you are, there you are, you insulting man! There you are, you villain, you liar, you coward; you who came into my house, even up to my altar, and gave me your word, only to break it shortly after. You perfidious person who vowed to me, who promised me on my altar only to deceive me; a traitor who enlisted under my banners, only to abandon them, follow the troops of my enemy, and serve the devil! So there you are, you traitor! Traitor! Traitor!'

"O my dear confreres, where do we stand in all that? Who could endure those terrible words? Who would not be crushed by them? What horrible thunderbolts! To break our word to a God, and to a terrifying God! Alas, Messieurs! What shall we do? We must tremble and have recourse to His infinite mercy.

"Here, then, Messieurs, are the two motives we must have for observing the vow of holy poverty: because we have given our word to the Superior and to God. The third one that occurred to me is that, without this holy virtue, it's impossible to live in peace in a Community like ours; and not only is it impossible to live well in it, but it's impossible even to persevere in it for very long. So, in the third place, Messieurs, I say that it's extremely difficult—if not impossible—for a person who has in mind the desire to acquire things, to be able to carry out his duty with us, to live according to the regulations he has embraced, and to follow the regular routine of the Company. And how can a man who thinks only of his own pleasure, of doing what he pleases, of eating fine food, of having a good time (for that's the goal of those who have this insatiable desire for possessions), how can such a person be exact in carrying out the purpose of the Mission? It can't be done. The practice of virtue, the regulations, and the good order of the house are incompatible with that love of riches and of his

personal satisfaction. It's very difficult to think at the same time of two such contrary things; it's impossible to put them into practice. Let's reflect on that, Messieurs, let's reflect on it, please.

"The spirit of the Missioner must be to consider his own perfection before all else. That's what the first article of our Rules recommends, following the principle of true charity, which must begin with ourselves, getting rid of our faults and acquiring the virtues suitable to our situation and vocation.

"Let's take a look at how that man who thinks only of riches can carry out this commandment. The man who wants to acquire them, who isn't content with his own situation, thinks night and day of nothing but the means he can use to acquire possessions; he has to have things depending on his mood; he has to have them and has to find the means to acquire them. That's all he thinks about; when he's alone in his room, he daydreams, 'Are we always going to be like that? No, no, things won't be like that; once I've done this, acquired that, and once we've reached that point, we'll do this, that, and the other thing.' And his poor mind gets bogged down with a thousand other thoughts.

"At night, he's still thinking about it; and when he wakes up, his first thought is 'Do we have to get up at four o'clock? The bell is ringing; will I always have this bothersome bell attached to my ears? It's still very early; that clock is too fast; how can we get up so early! I didn't sleep well during the night; I need another hour's rest. But they'll come to get me up. M. Vincent, who's always shouting, will come; he'll yell at me (what an annoying agitator!). 'Monsieur, what are you doing there? Everyone is at meditation; you're the only one still in bed. What's wrong with you, Monsieur? Get up!' " At meditation someone will say, 'Where's M. X? He's not here yet; he doesn't come to meditation any more; something's the matter.' They'll think even worse things.

"What's to be said about all that? Maybe he'll get up. He gets out of bed all upset, turning similar things over in his mind. Does he get up for love of God. Not at all. He does it because he's afraid of people making him feel ashamed. 'What will they say?' That's what he fears; that's what makes him get out of bed and come to meditation.

“And judge for yourselves, Messieurs: what can a man so well disposed do at meditation? O poor meditation, how badly you’ll be made! And You, my Savior and my God, how poorly this person will converse with You! Either he’ll fall asleep or he’ll be thinking about everything but what he should be thinking before God, in the presence of His Divine Majesty, before which the angels tremble. Wretch that he is, he’ll be thinking about means of acquiring things, and he’ll use this sacred time, destined for communing with God, to feed his emotions and to daydream about silly things and perhaps about something worse.

“And the Divine Sacrifice? Those thoughts will come back to him, and he won’t do much better there. But how will he recite his Office? Like everything else, with countless distractions.

“If those whose mind is as far removed from worldly ambitions as the sky is from earth and think of nothing every day but to rid themselves of them more and more are unable to do so, how in the world can you expect those who have their whole mind and their whole affection attached to earth to be exempt from that? How can this be done? It’s impossible, Messieurs; you know that better than I do.

“But what about being exact in our observances? Ah, God only knows! What about humility? Nothing so contrary to it. What about charity toward others? The desire to have possessions makes a man think only of himself. What about patience, gentleness, friendliness, kindness? What about that candor so strongly recommended? God knows. Chastity? God knows. How can you expect a man who never thinks of anything but his own pleasure and satisfaction or how he can have a good time and be comfortable, how can you expect him to be able to practice virtue? How? In a Community, everything is opposed to his desires; everything is a burden to him; he does things only by halves or if he’s forced to do them—unless perhaps he does them to satisfy his vanity and passion.

“What if he has to give a mission? It’s in a village where there are only poor peasants and old ladies. Oh, Monsieur is careful not to go there! If he thinks he’s going to be asked, he never fails to have a good supply of excuses; and a poor Superior is obliged to accept

them with a groan; what else could he do? But, if it's an important mission, where there's plenty to satisfy his vanity, he's my man. He goes after it; he makes his request and does all he can, directly or indirectly, to be sent there. 'Certain people will be there who'll hear me preach; certain others will also be there; I'll have many prominent persons of quality at my sermons—a great crowd; I'll work wonders there; people will talk about me afterward, saying, "Now there's a good Missioner, an excellent preacher, a fine man." ' That's just what he needs; it's the food on which that poor spirit feeds. 'M. X will tell people about me; and M. Y as well; and the good impression I'll leave of my ability will help me to get that office on this occasion.'

"*O Sauveur!* Is that being a Missioner? It's being a devil, not a Missioner. His spirit is the spirit of the world. He's already in the world in heart and affection; all that's in the Mission is his carcass. To seek his ease, to enjoy his pleasures, to live in clover, to have people think highly of him is the spirit of the world, and that's what he's after; that's his spirit.

"Messieurs, remember that riches are resources; they're means, that is, people want them in order to get something else, and that's the only reason a person wants to have possessions—to use them for the acquisition of honor or pleasures. That's why he wants to have them. Now, how can you expect that a man who aspires to that, who's unable or unwilling to observe any of our practices, who's already in heart and affection in the world and all that's here is his carcass, who wants and seeks after everything worldly men want and seek after, can remain steadfast in his vocation? That's impossible; you can see that, Messieurs; he's no longer here; he's here in body only. After failing to keep his word to the Superior and breaking the promise he had made to God, all he thinks about is to gratify his passion and seek pleasure, no matter what the cost.

"What conclusion shall we draw now about all this, Messieurs? What conclusion shall we draw, except what the Apostle and the Holy Spirit conclude, that *cupiditas, radix omnium malorum*.²

²*Avarice is the root of all evil.*

There's no evil in the world that doesn't spring from this accursed passion to possess. Greed, avarice, love of riches—there's the source of all sorts of ills. *Cupiditas, radix omnium malorum*. The person subject to this avarice bears within himself the principle, the origin, and the source of all evil, *radix omnium malorum*. There's nothing of which a man bitten by this desire, bearing its stamp, is not capable; he has within himself all he needs to be capable of committing every kind of insolence; there's no crime so shocking, so fearsome, so horrible, of which a man attached to his own interests can't easily become guilty. *Radix, radix omnium malorum*, it's the seed and the root of everything. *Radix*, the root; look for no other cause; there you have it.

“What I say about this isn't, thank God, because I'm aware that anyone here is affected by this evil; but that can happen; I say it *ad praeventionem*.³ Long before the evil occurred, the Son of God said to His disciples, ‘Be on your guard; there it is; I see it coming; it's at the door; be on your guard.’ I'd like to say the same, if I may, so that we may avoid that horrible monster, the most terrifying that hell can produce. If, thank God, there are none in the Company now, there may be some soon. *Venient ad vos in vestimentis ovium, intrisecus autem sunt lupi rapaces*.⁴ Under this gentle appearance, under this sheepskin, may be hidden the heart of a ravenous wolf. Be on your guard; let each man be on his guard; there may be some.

“There were only twelve in that holy Company of Our Lord; yet, one of them was affected by this evil. We have a frightening example in that unfortunate Judas, who clearly illustrates this truth: *cupiditas, radix omnium malorum*; that there's no crime so scandalous that a man who wants to have possessions may not commit. Saint Gregory and the other saints reflected in fear on that appalling fall of accursed Judas. Let's consider a little with them by what rationale that vile sin made him do it, in order to make him fall into the most horrible one of all. He had the common purse; everything was at his discretion and in his hands; he managed and did with it what-

³By way of prevention.

⁴They come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. Cf. Mt 7:15. (NAB)

ever he pleased. But this strong desire to have possessions made him grumble against his companions; he begrudged them everything; he even became angry with persons who tried to honor his Master by their generous gifts, because the gifts didn't go into his purse; he feathered his own nest; he stole the money of the community and of the poor. What else? He even regretted what was spent on the Son of God. Next, he went off with the enemies of his Master; he lived and conversed with them. And in such company how did he rip his Lord apart? *O Dieu!* He passed Him off as an imposter, a seducer, a magician. And, in fact, that's how He was treated afterward. In a word, he sold Him like an animal and the most unworthy, villainous of all men; he personally handed Him over to His enemies, under the pretext of friendship; afterward, he went off and, tormented by remorse for his crime, the wretch believed that His Master was not kind enough to pardon him. O gentle Savior! O God of mercy! That's despair. He hanged himself by his own hand. Hanging there, he burst asunder and spewed forth his accursed insides, where the desire for possessions had made him conceive so many crimes. In the end, he went to hell. So, Judas was damned; you see where the desire for possessions plunged him, after having led him from crime to crime, even to committing deicide—killing a God! After all that, don't we have reason to be fearful, since a man chosen by the Son of God, a man who always lived in His company and sat at His table arrived, by this vice, at the height of abomination!

“This vice, like others, slips in imperceptibly. In the beginning, it's a small thing: minor comforts; then greater liberty. The lion cub is growing. Small pleasures, then greater ones; then, like Judas, we must have possessions; all sorts of artifices are used—justly and unjustly—like Judas, who sold his Master; in the end, this viper becomes so furious that it bursts the entrails of the one who raised and hatched it in its womb.

“A few of those men—two among others—left here; that desire to possess in order to have a good time is what lured them away; don't think it was anything else. So then, the two of them left, and, after living in a way that God only knows, they died, as I'm about to tell

you, so that you may have a better idea of this monster. One of them, after having led—*O Dieu*—a wild life, died, but what a death! Shall I say how? No, it's better for me to keep silent about it. As for the other, when he fell ill and was on the verge of dying, he sent for a priest from this house. So, someone went to him. Before he died, he made his confession, saying, 'Ah, Monsieur! Among the many sins I've committed and which are weighing me down at this moment, I'm terribly tormented, in addition to the remorse of having abandoned my vocation, by the fact that, when I left, I took with me 500 livres belonging to the Mission; this is really tormenting me. Alas, Monsieur, now it's impossible for me to repay them! Have pity on me. Please explain to M. Vincent the deplorable state to which I'm reduced; beg and entreat him in the name of God to have compassion on my soul and to forgive me that sum of money so that, if I die, my soul may be freed of this debt; and, if I recover, I'll do all in my power to pay it back.'

"What's all that? Taking such a large sum of money, hiding it, keeping it for such a long time! See what avarice that is! Ah, that monster is really terrifying! Moved by compassion, I did forgive it—if I'm permitted to forgive it. I'm telling you this so that you may see better the horror of this crime and this insatiable desire to possess, which ruins everything, turns everything upside down, sparing not even the most holy things.

"This afternoon I was wondering if it were true that poverty was such a beautiful thing, and that a virtue could be so beautiful that Saint Francis used to call it his lady. How ravishing it is! It seemed to me that it was endowed with such excellence that, if we could have the happiness of the slightest glimpse of it, we'd fall in love with it immediately and never want to be separated from it; we'd never leave it and would seek it above all the goods of this world. Oh, if God were to grant us the grace of opening the curtain that prevents us from seeing such beauty; if only He were to lift, by His grace, all the veils that the world and our self-love cast before our eyes, Messieurs, we'd be immediately delighted with the charms of that virtue which delighted the heart and affections of the Son of God! It was the virtue of the Son of God; He willed to have it as His own; He was the first to

teach it; He willed to be the master of it. Before Him, people didn't know what poverty was; it was unknown. God didn't will to teach it to us through the prophets; He reserved that to himself, and He himself came to teach it to us. In the Old Law, they didn't acknowledge it; only riches were esteemed; no consideration was given to poverty because they didn't recognize its merit.

"It's in Ecclesiastes, but that was under the Old Law, in which poverty wasn't acknowledged; its excellence had reserved that for the Son of God, who was to preach it to us by word and example. O Savior, merciful Savior, reveal to us yourself by Your grace the beauty of this virtue, so exalted that You yourself came to teach it to us! All His sermons begin with it. In Saint Matthew, he places it first among the eight beatitudes. He makes it, as it were, the basis of His teaching and of perfection. To a man who had kept all the Commandments of God He says, *Si vis perfectus esse, vende omnia quae habes et da pauperibus*.⁵ Sell all your belongings; leave everything; keep nothing for yourself; it's the gate, the entrance to perfection; it puts us in a perfect state—not that it's our perfection, but because it's a necessary disposition to arrive at it, and a condition, a state through which we must pass and in which we must be to become perfect; whereas, on the contrary, the desire to have possessions is a state that opens to us the broad, spacious way to every sort of evil. But let's see what this state of poverty is, what this virtue is, and in what it consists, which is the second point.

"Alas! I've spent too much time on the first point. Time is flying. I'll finish soon, so please bear with me, my dear confreres. Saint Paul said, *supportate me, supportate me*.⁶ Please, then, bear with me a little this evening; just have a little patience until I finish.

"Now then, poverty is a voluntary renunciation of all worldly goods for the love of God, in order to serve Him better and to reflect on our salvation. It's a renunciation, a relinquishment, an abandonment, an abnegation. This renunciation is exterior and interior, not just exterior. We mustn't renounce all our exterior possessions

⁵If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor. Cf. Mt 19:21. (NAB)

⁶Put up with me, put up with me. Cf. 2Cor 11:1. (NAB)

only; this renunciation must also be interior and come from the heart. Along with our possessions, we must also give up the attachment and love of possessions, and have no love for the perishable goods of this world. It's doing nothing, it's making a mockery of an exterior renunciation of goods, if we hold on to the desire to have them. God asks primarily for our heart—our heart—and that's what counts. How is it that a man who has no wealth will have greater merit than someone who has great possessions that he gives up? Because the one who has nothing does it with greater love; and that's what God especially wants, as we see with the Apostles.

"There are countless acts of this virtue; besides the one our brother just mentioned, I can think of three main sorts, and they concern lodging, food, and clothing. We can practice holy poverty in everything, being satisfied with what God gives us, just as we can sin against it by being discontented, complaining, grumbling, and murmuring. But, *O Sauveur!* What valid reason can we have for complaining about all that? What do we lack? And what person in the world has all that we have here? We have not only what we need to protect us from heat and cold, but also, thank God, from the slightest inconvenience.

"This building is sufficiently large and comfortable. We have beautiful gardens and an enclosure. *Eh Dieu!* The Apostles and disciples of Our Lord didn't have such comforts. And didn't the Son of God lack them? Like those who followed Him, He suffered nakedness, cold and heat, hunger and thirst. And what do we have to suffer? Nothing! We don't want to put up with anything; we're not satisfied with this building or its furnishings; we have to have papered rooms and upholstered chairs; we must have beautiful books and fine furniture. This cursed spirit of having whatever can gratify our sensuality is never satisfied.

"As for food, where can you find better bread, better wine, better meat, or better fruit? What's lacking? What men in the world have all that? Alas! How many people—and persons of rank at that—don't have what we have! A Councillor in the Parlement would be happy with it. As a rule, men of gentle birth don't have anything more, except perhaps those who have venison and wild game. I know

Bishops who live and are satisfied with a helping of meat like we get. And these are Bishops! *O Sauveur!* What may people say of us, if, after that, we're not satisfied? That we want to live more comfortably here, more splendidly, more as we please, to live better than people in the world. Yet, we've given that up! *O Sauveur!* I don't know of any who complain about this, thank God; but let's anticipate the evil; it can happen; let's anticipate the evil; *ad praeventionem*.

"It's also contrary to holy poverty to be dissatisfied with the books we have; and, by the goodness of God, there are plenty of them here, and of several sorts. We also sin against this virtue by acting as if we own them—as if they were for our personal use alone; and that happens only too often. We take books, we carry them off, we make them our own. And this vice affects everyone, sometimes even those thought to be the most virtuous. Not three days ago someone in the Company—shall I say it—the Superior of one of the houses, told me, 'When M. X left here, he took with him. . . .' Shall I say it? No, I shouldn't; the human mind might start thinking, 'Who left? Who was sent away?' And if I'm telling you all this, it's only to help us realize the distortion of this accursed avarice and the beauty of that beautiful virtue of poverty.

"There are many other acts, those our brother just mentioned, and countless others that I'm omitting.

"*Or sus*, my dear confreres, let's examine ourselves now; let each one take a look into his conscience and say, 'Let's see, don't I have some attachment to this or that? If that's the case, and we feel guilty, let's eliminate this evil spirit, this devil, from among us. If our conscience doesn't reproach us on that point, fine! *In nomine Domini!* Blessed be God! Blessed be God! I've finished. Now, have a little patience so we can look at some means.

"Our Brother mentioned the means of means: to ask it often of God, to ask Him to give us this spirit that's proper to Him and which He shares with His children; to make our meditation often for this purpose, for poverty is a gift—a great gift—from God.

"Another means is to grow to love it by every way imaginable. We've given our word on this to the Superior; we've promised it to

God; without poverty we can do nothing. No, my dear confreres, a Missioner will never be a Missioner without the virtue of poverty. We couldn't last without this virtue. Reflect often on its beauty: it's the well-beloved of God, the very virtue of His Son, His Mother, and His friends. The horror of that spirit of independence and of the desire to possess things, which is opposed to it and lures us from the post where God has placed us, causes us to abandon our vocation; for what are those persons who leave looking for? Doubtless, to put themselves in a more perfect state. They want to have wealth in order to serve God better in the world. They'll be in a holier state; they'll live more perfectly in the world because the world is a more perfect state. As you see, that's what they claim. Or maybe they want to gratify themselves, to have a good time, to live in clover, to enjoy fine food. Of necessity it has to be either one or the other; there's no middle course: they leave either because they'll be in a more perfect state in the world, or because they'll have more freedom there.

“The world is a more perfect state; it's sanctity itself; people live better there than on retreat! Alas, Messieurs! See how they fool themselves. What's left, then, is to seek their independence and to have a good time; that, I tell you, that's why they leave. Remember that. That's why some men have left. We can see in this how detestable this desire for appropriation is and how lovable holy poverty is, since it places us and maintains us in a state of perfection which we couldn't attain without its assistance. It's a necessity for anyone who wants to follow the Son of God to become perfect; he must leave everything. *Vade, vende omnia quae habes et da pauperibus*. It's the first of the beatitudes; it's the legacy the Son of God left to His dear children in this world.

“A third means—an excellent and very beneficial one—is to make acts of it often, as our Brother has said. We have favorable opportunities always and everywhere. We have to make both exterior and interior acts of it at least once a day—one act each day. Yes, my God, I willingly renounce all the goods of this world; I don't want to have any of them; I'm content to be without them, since it pleases You. So, my Savior, I've left and renounce willingly once again, for love

of God, all the goods I might have had in the world, not for our parents' sake—for that's loving our parents and not God—but it's for love of God, it's for God, for God that we must renounce our possessions, not to enrich our parents. Those who have greater devotion and a stronger spirit can make two acts of poverty daily—even up to three—in order to have their souls imbued with the spirit of holy poverty, from which all sorts of good things come to us, and by which we rise to the highest perfection.

“*Or sus*, blessed be God! These means will suffice, along with the others that each of you have thought of, since you don't have time to say more about them, and because I've already gone on too long. My dear confreres, all of us unanimously will ask God for this spirit of poverty; and I entreat you, my dear confreres, I beg you by the poverty of the Son of God, by the depths of the mercy of J[esus] C[hrist], and by all that's dear to you, not to let a day pass without performing some act of holy poverty—not murmuring, being satisfied with what God has given us. Ah! How happy we'll be to suffer something for the sake of holy poverty, to be poorly housed, to lack comforts while on mission, here or otherwise! How many men in the world are without shelter! And even the Son of God! *Vulpes foveas habent et volucres caeli nidos; Filius autem hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet.*⁷ But I also ask and recommend as strongly as I can to those who look after poverty, to provide for the needs of others, not allowing them to lack anything, and once a week—and twice rather than once—to be careful to ask each one individually what he needs and to take care of it; and I entreat all of you to say what your needs are. The man in charge of providing for the priests should be very careful of this. I recommend to those responsible for this with the Brothers and seminarians, in a word, with all those entrusted to his care, to be very diligent and exact about it. But also, let's not be bothered with thinking, like people of the world, of what we'll get or not get; let's live without worrying, and think only of our salvation and of serving God. What a happiness to be free from all those pressing concerns

⁷*Foxes have dens, the birds of the sky have their nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.* Cf. Mt 8:20. (NAB)

and to live in holy poverty, where God is our Provider! Let's be lovers of this beautiful virtue; let's ask God often for it.

"Yes, my Savior, my most merciful Savior, we entreat You most humbly to give us the grace to practice, for the rest of our lives, this holy virtue, which was proper to You and which You came to teach us; we beg You, by the depths of Your mercy, to give us this spirit and a share in the great love You have for this virtue.

"I ask the priests to celebrate Mass for this intention, and our Brothers to offer their Communions at the first opportunity, that God, by His holy mercy, may pour this spirit upon us and on all the Orders that need it. Let's hope for this grace from His goodness. Blessed be God!"

133. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 16, 1655

M. Vincent took the opportunity to speak about what a Brother cleric said at the beginning his Repetition of Prayer, namely, that, when he tried to place himself in the presence of God, he began to wonder if it was true that Our Lord was present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar or whether this wasn't a trifle. At that point M. Vincent interrupted him, saying that it wasn't proper or very respectful to talk like that, and he shouldn't be doing it. He added that to dwell on such thoughts would be, in a certain sense, to doubt the truth of the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. 'Is He there or isn't He?' "Now that's a serious fault, and it gives me reason for telling you, my dear confreres, that I fear several of you are not making your meditation properly—although it's one of the best means we can have to acquire virtue—and that you're wasting too much time searching for reasons and passages, and to

Conference 133. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 27 v^o.

¹*Subheading:* Meditation; practice in preaching.

adapting and arranging them, which is not really meditation but rather study. You say to yourself, ‘If I’m questioned, I have to say something,’ so you waste time preparing what you have to say. Now, Brothers, you shouldn’t be doing that.

“A few days ago, someone in the Company, who comes from the country, told me he felt that the Company had grown lax with regard to meditation and the way of making it. You see, those who come from outside and have been away from the house for a while see the faults much better than those who have been here all the time.

“I recall that one day I went to see the late M. de Marillac,² who was a great servant of God and a very prayerful man. On entering his study, I immediately spotted a cobweb on the crucifix that was on his prie-dieu. Thinking that perhaps the spider had woven the web during the preceding night, I had the curiosity to go closer to get a good look at it, but I saw a few signs that made me realize it had already been there for some time. Then I said to myself, ‘O my Lord, doubtless this great servant of God is so recollected and so humbled before the Majesty of God that he wouldn’t dare look at the image here on earth of Him who is in heaven because he has so much respect and reverence for Him.’ Now, to discern the means of doing something well, we have to consider the advantages and disadvantages, what may be useful and what may be harmful—at meditation, for example. I’m going to say something about that.

“(1) Those who go to it apathetically and for form’s sake; when a person acts like that, going to meditation in that way is a great obstacle to making his meditation well.

“(2) The spirit of curiosity, causing a man to go over things with a fine-tooth comb, trying to find many passages to relate in order to show off; that’s anything but meditation, for meditation must be

²Michel de Marillac, the uncle of Saint Louise, was born in Paris on October 9, 1563. He helped Mme Acarie to establish the first Carmel in France: his influence, purse, and time were at her service. Five members of his family entered Carmel. Named Keeper of the Seals in 1629, he drafted the *Code Michau* (the first French code of law), which the Parlement did not want to register. Cardinal Richelieu accused him of conspiracy and imprisoned him in Caen, then in Châteaudun, where he died on August 7, 1632. His heart was given to the Carmelites of the rue Chapon, and his body was buried in the chapel of the Carmelites in the faubourg Saint-Jacques.

made only to make us better and to help us correct our faults and acquire the virtues contrary to our failings; and that's what causes headaches and stomach aches. Having considered that, the first thing to be done at meditation is to place ourselves in the presence of God in one of the four ways the blessed Francis de Sales teaches. One day, Commander de Sillery³ said to me on this subject that a saint⁴ had told him that what he found most helpful in making his meditation well was first to place himself properly in the presence of God, considering that God saw and looked on him and had His eyes fixed on him. Then, we can make the usual acts and go on to the second part of meditation, which is the body of the meditation, and contemplate the subject, be it a virtue, a vice, or some Mystery.

“For example, today the subject of our meditation is the love of God and the reasons we have to love God. Alas, Brothers, we don't have to look for many reasons to excite us to this love! We don't have to go outside ourselves to find any; we have only to consider the good things He's done for us and continues to do for us daily. And to oblige us even further, He has commanded us to do it. You see that this subject of itself sets our will afire.

“When, at meditation, the soul is immediately set afire, what need is there for reasons? For example, when a person needs light in the

³Noël Brulart de Sillery, Commander of the Knights of Saint John of Malta in Troyes, held the highest posts at Court, was the Queen's First Squire, then her Knight of Honor, and Extraordinary Ambassador to Italy, Spain, and later in Rome to Popes Gregory XV and Urban VIII. Renouncing public life, he left the magnificent Hôtel de Sillery, sold his possessions, and, toward the end of 1632, went to live in a modest house near the First Monastery of the Visitation. Saint Vincent, his director, had brought about this miracle. When he saw the Commander detached from the world, he helped him make good use of his immense fortune. He took him to prisons and hospitals and initiated him in works of charity. Sillery began his priestly studies in 1632 and was ordained a priest in 1634, celebrating his first Mass on Holy Thursday, April 13, 1634, in the chapel of the Visitation. He gave generously to religious Congregations, especially to the Visitation, the Congregation of the Mission, the Monastery of the Madeleine, the Jesuits, and Carmel, and, together with Saint Vincent, tried unsuccessfully to organize a seminary in the House of the Templiers in Paris. Since he died on September 26, 1640, at the age of sixty-three, his priestly life was short, but it was replete with works of charity. Saint Vincent assisted him in his last moments and celebrated his funeral service. (Cf. *Vie de l'illustre serviteur de Dieu Noël Brulart de Sillery; Histoire chronologique* [1843], vol. I, pp. 290-307; cf. also, Marcel-Martin Fosseyeux, “Contribution à l'histoire du monastère de la Visitation Sainte-Marie du faubourg Saint-Antoine au XVII^e siècle,” *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Île-de-France*, [1910], pp. 184-202.)

⁴In a note: “It is believed that this is Francis de Sales.”

place where he is, what does he do? He strikes his flint to make a spark, and, at the same time, brings his wick close to it and lights his candle. When he's done that, he's satisfied; he doesn't keep on striking the flint or go to look for another to light a spark, because he has one and no longer needs it; it's already done, and the light he has suffices to make things clear for him. In the same way, as soon as a soul begins his meditation and has considered a reason, and this reason suffices to set his will afire with the desire for virtue or to turn away from vice, and that suffices to make him see the beauty of the former or the ugliness of the latter, please tell me what need that person has to look for reasons elsewhere. All that would serve only to upset him and make his head and stomach ache.

“What's to be done after that? Should we stop there, satisfied with being fired up in that way and convinced of the subject on which we're meditating? By no means, rather we have to move on to resolutions and the means of acquiring the virtue or avoiding the vice on which we're meditating. If it's a virtue, we have to see the obstacles and the occasions that may cause us to fall into the contrary vice, and then take appropriate means to put them into practice. My God, from this day on I want to begin in earnest, and, for this purpose, I intend to do such and such a thing.

“That, my dear confreres, is how our meditations should be made; above all we have to be very careful to thank God for the thoughts He gives us; gratitude is a disposition for receiving new graces. Let's ask God today, at Holy Mass and in our Communions, to grant the Company the grace to act in this way and to give it the gift of prayer. Let's not be satisfied with asking for this gift for ourselves alone, but also for the whole Company in general.

“This is the period when the Company has fewer commitments than at any other time because of the temporary halt of the missions. During this time we're accustomed to getting some practice either in controversy or in preaching, to composing sermons and sharing them with one another—as we used to do when the Bishop of Alet⁵

⁵Nicolas Pavillon was born on November 17, 1597. As a very young priest he placed himself under the direction of M. Vincent, who had him teach catechism and work in the missions and the Charities, where his presence was deemed useful. More than once he entrusted him with the

was here in this house—or to explaining Holy Scripture. I thought we'd do well to practice preaching, in order to see how each one is getting along because a year ago a certain man preached in such a way, but now has changed and preaches differently; in this way we'll see which men are doing it properly. Previously, we sometimes did this in the refectory, but I think it will be a good idea to do it privately somewhere else so we can see how well each man is doing. The priests and seminarians will come for this. Each will take his turn, beginning with the priests, followed by the students and the seminary, who will also come for it. I'll go first, then M. Portail. I can't do it tomorrow or the day after because of some business I have; God willing, it will be on Thursday; we can do it after Vespers in the hall at Saint-Lazare.

"Last Friday, I gave the Company reason to be scandalized because I was shouting so loud and clapping my hands that it seemed like I was annoyed with someone; that's why I ask pardon of the Company for this."⁶

conferences and retreats for priests. Appointed to the diocese of Alet in 1637, Pavillon accepted it only on the saint's urging. This new office did not deter him from his apostolic works: he gave a mission in Rueil at Richelieu's invitation, then in Saint-Germain-en-Laye at the King's request. He was consecrated at Saint-Lazare on August 22, 1639, and went to his diocese accompanied by Étienne Blatiron. A zealous, intelligent Bishop, dedicated to reform, he justified the expectations placed on him. His episcopate would have been more fruitful had he been more on his guard against Jansenistic ideas. Saint Vincent begged him in vain to sign the formulary against Jansenism. Pavillon died on December 8, 1677. There are several biographies of him, notably that of Étienne Dejean, *Un prélat indépendant au XVII^e siècle, Nicolas Pavillon, évêque d'Alet (1637-77)* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1909].

⁶*In the margin:* "Note: For this purpose, M. Vincent went on his knees before the whole Company, then went off to vest for Mass."

134. - METHOD TO BE FOLLOWED IN PREACHING

August 20, 1655

“Euntes in mundum universum, praedicate Evangelium omni creaturae: Go into the whole world, *in mundum universum*, and preach the Gospel to every creature. These are the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ, taken from Saint Mark, chapter 16.¹ I think, Messieurs, that these words, which Our Lord said to His Apostles before ascending to heaven, are also addressed to the entire Company and, in particular, to those destined for preaching. I’ve often been very consoled—and it consoles me even today—to see that God has granted us the grace, as He did for His Apostles, of sending us out to preach His word throughout the world. *O Sauveur!* We have the same mandate as the Apostles! So we see, by the mercy of God, a man going off joyously to carry this word to the ends of the earth. You have only to say to him, ‘Monsieur, when are you leaving for Italy, for Poland?’ Those men are always ready, by the grace of God; they go everywhere like the Apostles, and they preach the word of God the way the Apostles preached it.

“How did the Apostles preach? Very plainly, simply, and familiarly. That’s our style of preaching, too: plainly and familiarly in ordinary language. To preach like an Apostle, Messieurs, that is, to preach well and in a helpful way, you have to approach it with simplicity, using familiar speech, so that each person will be able to understand and profit by it. That’s how the disciples and Apostles preached and how Jesus Christ preached; God has bestowed a great favor on this insignificant, wretched Company in giving us the happiness of imitating Him in that.

“We have to admit, Messieurs, that this method isn’t observed everywhere; in order to turn out something useful along with the pleasant, the great perversity of the world has constrained preachers to use fine words and subtle ideas and to make use of anything that may suggest eloquence, so as to satisfy them in some way and to do what-

Conference 134. - Manuscript of Conferences.

¹Cf. Mk 16:15. (NAB)

ever they can to put a stop to the wickedness of the world. But, *Sauveur!* what good is this pompous rhetoric? What progress do they make with that? None that's obvious; unless, perhaps, they're trying to preach to themselves! So then, it's to the Little Company, in preference to others, that God, in His mercy has willed to turn to give it His own method. That method comes from God; men have nothing to do with it; and the effects make us see that it's from God. So, I'm going to give this conference on that method of preaching, and then, one after the other, we'll continue, even down to the seminarians, so that every one of us may be able to learn this method.

"My sermon, then, is on the method of preaching well. And, so that by dealing with the method I can follow it myself, I'm dividing my sermon into three points: in the first we'll see the reasons urging us to love this method; in the second, I'll explain in what this method consists so that we may be familiar with it and can put it into practice in the future; and in the third, I'll set forth some means to help us to attain this method.

"For that, we need the grace of God. O Savior, we humbly entreat You to shed it upon us. O Holy Spirit, we beseech You to do this through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. And because we're engaged here in familiar conversation, we greet her only in our hearts, which I ask you to do.

"The first point, Messieurs, concerns the reasons we have for adopting the familiar method of preaching that God has been pleased to give to this Little Company. The first reason is its effectiveness. This method is very effective, very effective, in enlightening the understanding and moving the will, in showing clearly the splendor and beauty of virtue and the horrible ugliness of vice, and in giving people all they need to extricate themselves from the quagmire of sin and to get on the beautiful path of grace and the practice of good works. This great effectiveness is easily seen by the consideration of what is achieved by means of the method. Let's take a look at its effects, Messieurs, let's see what it produces.

"I declare that this method contains all that needs to be put forward to persuade people well; it neglects nothing at all that can contribute to convincing and winning them over. I venture to suggest

that no other way of preaching is so effective—at least as far as I know. No, I repeat that there's no way of preaching now being followed that's so suitable for winning hearts and producing great effects. Please don't take my word on this; see for yourselves, Messieurs, consider carefully all the methods we observe in preaching, consider carefully and judge sincerely and according to what your heart tells you, according to your conscience. Place your hand on your heart before God, and tell me if there's any more powerful method to reach the goal and attain its purpose than ours.

“Following this method, the first thing we do is to explain the reasons and motives that may affect and incline the mind to detest sin and vice and to seek virtue. But it's not enough to tell myself how much I'm obliged to acquire a virtue, if I don't know what that virtue is or in what it consists. ‘I see clearly that I really need it and that this virtue is very necessary for me, but, Monsieur, I don't know what it is or where to find it. Alas! I don't know, miserable man that I am, how can I put it into practice unless you do me the favor of showing it to me, of teaching me in what it principally consists, and what are its works and purposes!’

“That brings us to the second point, which does all that; for, according to our method, after the reasons that should incline our hearts toward virtue, we show in the second place in what that virtue consists, its essence and nature, its properties and functions, its acts and those contrary to it, and the signs and practice of that virtue. You open the curtain and discover fully the splendor and beauty of that virtue, explaining familiarly and simply what it is and which acts of it must be practiced especially, always going into detail.

“*Or sus*, now I see clearly what it is, in what that virtue consists, the actions in which it's found, and its acts. I think I know all that well; it's all good and very necessary, but it's really hard, Monsieur! What are the means of attaining it, the means of putting this beautiful, desirable virtue into practice? I don't know what I'm obliged to do or what approach I should take. What shall I do?” Fine, Messieurs, do you honestly think that it's enough to have given that person reasons and to have explained to him in what the virtue consists if you stop there and leave things at that? I don't know, but frankly I don't think

that's enough; what's more, if you leave him like that without giving him any means to practice what you've taught him, in my opinion I think you've made hardly any progress; you're not serious; you've done nothing if you stop at that; you're not serious. And you see that better than I do, Messieurs, for how can you expect me to do something, even though I know I really need and want to do it, if I don't have the means of doing it? How do you expect me to do it? That's not being serious; it can't be done. But give that man the means—and this is the third part of the method—give him the means to practice that virtue, and that satisfies him.

“What does he lack now? Doesn't that man have what he needs to strive for the virtue? Is there anything that remains to be said? No, I can't think of anything. You've shown him, first of all, the great benefits of that virtue, the great losses that might occur from being deprived of it, and all the evils of its contrary vice. You've shown him how important and necessary it is; then, you've let him see and have pointed out to him what it is, in what that virtue consists, the means, and how to practice it; in a word, you've provided him with the means to acquire it. After that, what remains to be done in order to guide and incline a man in the practice of virtue? What remains, Messieurs? Please tell me, do you know of anything else? Do you, Messieurs? If so, would you do me the favor of telling me?

“As for me, I never knew of any nor do I know of any now, for what is done, what's required when someone wants to convince a man of the love and practice of something? Nothing but this: you're shown the great benefits accruing from it, the drawbacks of taking the opposite course; you're helped to see what it is, you're shown its beauty; and, in a word, if the means of acquiring it are placed in your hands, there's nothing more to be done. Nothing more is done to convince and win over a man, regardless of who he is. And that's our method; that's what the little method does. There's no point going off and wasting time in anything else. I solemnly declare to you in all truth, as old as I am, that I don't know nor have ever heard it said that anything else was needed to persuade a man. Daily experience proves to us that, when the powerful reasons we have for doing something are given, our soul immediately endeavors to do it, our

will embraces it and needs nothing more; it wants it, it wills to have it; we desire nothing else but opportunities wherever they're found and the means of making it our own. Don't you sense this, Messieurs? Isn't it true that this is how it happens and not otherwise? And is anything else needed? *O Dieu!* Not that I know of.

"You see clearly then the great efficacy of the little method; you see it clearly, Messieurs; but, so that this efficacy may appear more clearly and distinctly, if possible, let's take something ordinary, a familiar example. When we want to persuade a man to take a job, to accept an office, to get married, what do we do, if not to point out to him the pleasure, the benefit, and the honor that come with all that and the great advantages to be found in it?

"If someone wants to influence a man to become Presiding Judge, what strategy does he use? All he has to do is to point out to him the advantages and the great honor that go with the office: 'A Presiding Judge, Monsieur, is the highest ranking man in the city; everyone is deferential to him; there's no one who doesn't hold him in high regard; his authority gives him great credibility in society and in the courts; he can do anything. O Monsieur, a Presiding Judge! He doesn't defer to a Bishop; sovereigns themselves accede to him and pay him great honor. A Presiding Judge! He can oblige others to do things, please anyone he likes, acquire a good number of friends, and have himself respected everywhere. Oh, oh, Monsieur, a Presiding Judge! That's really great!' And then he goes on to tell him the other advantages of being Presiding Judge.

"At first you see him burning with desire to have this fine high position. And what does the person tell him to enkindle this desire in him? The advantages, as you see, that are in this office, the reasons and motivations obliging him to have it. But is one content with that? Not at all; it must come down to this: what is the office of Presiding Judge, Monsieur? In what does it consist? What has to be done in this position? What is it? 'You're the highest-ranking law officer in the court, that great and honorable body; you're its head; you never have to plead a case; you assign the cases; you're the one who takes the votes of the others and pronounces judgment.'

“And there you have a man eager to acquire the office of Presiding Judge, and who knows already in what it consists. But with all that he has nothing if the means of obtaining this office aren’t suggested to him; he’d be right to become angry and complain of that impertinent counselor who came to him to make him want this office, without suggesting to him any means to obtain it. But if the man who gives the advice also tells him the means, ‘Monsieur, you have this much income here, this much money in another place; take a certain sum from this place and a certain amount from the other; furthermore, I know M. X, who has this office to sell; and M. Y is a close friend of mine and of him. I’ll have the two of them get together; we’ll work it out; we’ll do this and that; we’ll obtain this and that,’ then that’s serving a man well and putting him on the surest path to attain the high position of Presiding Judge, whereas, if, after showing him the great advantages of this office and familiarizing him with it, the person were to leave him without giving him the means of obtaining it, he would have achieved nothing but to disturb the peace of that man and cause him trouble. There’s nothing in the world where we don’t use the same means, when we want to convince someone; it’s the most effective way to do it, and it’s impossible not to accept it, if we’re really intelligent.

“Messieurs, the same holds true for spiritual matters; and to incline a man’s mind to them I know of no other means than to point out clearly to him the advantages accruing from it, in what they consist, and what must be done to have them; so, there’s no intelligent person who doesn’t assent to these powerful reasons. And who could hold out against this method, since it contains in itself everything that can incline men to strive for the acquisition of something: the advantages and disadvantages that may result from it, in what it consists, and the means of obtaining it? As for me, I see no better method and am more convinced of this truth than of anything. Who doesn’t see it? It’s so obvious that you’d have to be blind not to see it. *O Sauveur!* So, Messieurs, that’s the first reason we have for adopting the practice: its efficacy, its great efficacy.

“My second reason is that it’s the method Our Lord Jesus Christ himself willed to use to convince us of His teaching; it’s also by this

method that the Apostles made the word of God known throughout the world. O Savior, it's Your own method! Yes, Messieurs, it's the method the Son of God used to proclaim His Gospel to us. O Savior! The Son of God, who was the Word and Eternal Wisdom, willed to treat the loftiness of His Mysteries in language that seemed lowly, ordinary, and familiar. And will we be ashamed to do this? Will we be afraid of losing respect if we act like the Son of God? *O Sauveur!*

“But where do we find that the Son of God used this method? In the Gospel, in the Gospel. Here are the three points of the method used in His sermons. Let's take a look at how He did it. When Jesus Christ preached . . . what? Take poverty, for example; in Saint Matthew He makes it the first of the beatitudes and begins all His sermons with it: *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*,² blessed are the poor of heart and of affection because the kingdom of heaven is their portion. This is the first reason the Savior of the world puts forth to incline people to love poverty: *Beati pauperes*; blessed are the poor. What a great reason to love poverty, since that's what brings happiness! But in what does this beatitude consist? It's this, like a second reason that confirms the first: *Quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. And after these reasons, He teaches us what poverty is. When the young man came to find Our Lord to learn from Him what he should do to ensure his salvation, Jesus told him, *Vende omnia*,³ sell everything, keep nothing for yourself. And that's the perfect expression and explanation of what poverty consists in: in perfect renunciation of all earthly things, total renunciation; *vende omnia*. He also gives His disciples the means to do this when He says to them shortly after, ‘It's more difficult to . . . , I say: it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter paradise;⁴ the gate is very narrow,⁵ and those persons who are inflated and encumbered with possessions can't

²*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Cf. Mt 5:3. (NAB)

³*Sell all. . . .* Cf. Mt 19:21 (NAB)

⁴Cf. Mt 19:24. (NAB)

⁵Cf. Mt 7:13-14. (NAB)

pass through it. What a powerful means, a powerful means, for drawing people after Him! It goes to the extreme, it includes the necessity of one's salvation; there's no way to do it if the heart is attached to riches. What a powerful means for embracing poverty!

"This, Messieurs, is the whole method in Our Lord's sermons; as we just saw, He explains the reasons, the acts, what it is, and gives powerful means.

"That brings us to the Apostles; how did they convince people of the truths of the Gospel? By preaching them in the vernacular, in a simple, familiar style. We see this in all their writings; *non in persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis*.⁶ We don't make use of the subtleties of eloquence to attract you to our side; we don't flatter you with beautiful, pleasing words; we don't use sophisms of human prudence; *non in persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis*; we've said only what was necessary to give you a simple knowledge of virtue, which is in the faith we preach to you, dealing with you in all simplicity, without trying to surprise you, quite plainly, so that you may see—not by our skill and ingenious arguments, but by the virtue of God, which shines forth in lowliness and simplicity—the truth of the Mysteries we've come to preach to you; *non in persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis, sed in ostentione spiritus et virtutis*.⁷

"After the Apostles, all the apostolic men who followed put their method into practice, preaching familiarly, without that ostentatious eloquence full of vanity. Whoever says 'Missioner,' Messieurs, says 'Apostle;' so then, we have to act like the Apostles, since we're sent, like them, to teach the people, to whom we must go quite plainly in all simplicity, if we want to be Missioners and imitate the Apostles and Jesus Christ.

"The third reason in favor of the little method is the consideration of the great results that have come from sermons given according to this method. If I had to tell the slightest part of what God has been pleased to bring about by this method, I'd never come to

⁶ . . . not with the persuasive words of human wisdom.

⁷ Not with the persuasive words of human wisdom, but with the convincing power of the Spirit. Cf. 1 Cor 2:4. (NAB)

an end. We have so many examples of this that I wouldn't finish by this evening. Let's just take one or two of them in order the better to discover the great benefits of the little method. Here's one, without equal, of something that didn't reach us; I've never heard—I, with all my white hair—I've never heard that any preacher ever came to that. *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* Several of you, Messieurs, know that bandits are thieves in Italy; they terrorize the countryside, stealing and pillaging everywhere; they're criminals and murderers—and there are many murders in that country because of the vendettas that are rampant there; they eat one another alive, refusing to forgive, so fanatical are they. People of that ilk, after getting rid of their enemies to escape being tried in court, and even many other wicked people, lie in wait on the highways and live in the woods in order to rob the poor peasants and strip them of their possessions. They're called bandits, and there are so many of them that they're all over Italy; there are very few villages—almost none—where there are no bandits. Now, then, when the mission had been given in some of those villages, the bandits who were there gave up that wicked way of life and were converted, by the grace of God, who willed in that to make use of the little method. That was something we had never heard of; it was unheard of! No one had ever seen bandits give up their thieving, for any reason whatsoever. And that, Messieurs, is what God was pleased to bring about by this poor, insignificant Company, preaching according to the little method.

“*O Sauveur!* Isn't it true, M. Martin,⁸ that the bandits in Italy were converted during our missions? Isn't it true that you were

⁸Jean Martin, born in Paris on May 10, 1620, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 9, 1638. He was ordained in Rome on April 25, 1645, and that same year was sent to Genoa to found a new house. Saint Vincent probably had no Missioner more gifted in drawing crowds and converting souls. In 1654 Martin was recalled to France and placed in Sedan as Superior and Pastor; then, in 1655, he was sent to Turin for the new establishment founded by the Marchese di Pianezza, Prime Minister of State. There, as in Genoa and Sedan, the zealous Missioner knew how to soften the most hardened hearts. He was given the name “Apostle of Piedmont” and his fellow Missioners were called “the holy Fathers.” In 1665 René Alméras asked him to head the house in Rome. This was a painful sacrifice for Martin, but he resigned himself to it. Subsequently, he was named Superior in Genoa (1670), Turin (1674), Rome (1677), Perugia (1680), and again in Rome in 1681, where he died on February 17, 1694. His obituary, written by one of his contemporaries, is in the Archives of the Mission in Paris. It was published, with some corrections, in vol. I of *Notices*, pp. 269-372.

there? We're here in an informal discussion; please tell us how that came about."

M. Martin: "Yes, Monsieur, that's how it was; in the villages where we gave the mission, the bandits came to us for confession, like the other people; that's what usually happened."

"*O Sauveur*, isn't that amazing! Bandits converted by sermons given according to the little method! O Messieurs, bandits converted!

"But here's the other little example, which is almost just as admirable. A short time ago, someone wrote me from l'Ausun, that the mission had been given in . . . , a village on the seacoast; and it was seminarians from here—yes, seminarians—who gave that mission; maybe there was someone else, but there were definitely two seminarians; doubtless someone else was with them. There had been a shipwreck on that coast; merchandise and other cargo the ship was carrying were washed ashore; everyone in the village of which I'm speaking and in the surrounding area rushed to the spot as if they were sacking a town and carried off anything they could get their hands on—some a bundle of goods, some took fabric, some seized clothing—in a word each one carried off whatever he could take, with no qualms of conscience. That was robbing the poor, unfortunate merchants who had been shipwrecked. So, when the mission had been given in those villages, following the little method, they returned to those poor merchants whatever had been taken; after they had been exhorted and preached to according to the method, they resolved to give back everything. Some brought back the bundles of goods; others, the fabric; others, money; others, not having what they could pay back right away, gave their word to make restitution.

"These, Messieurs, are the effects of the little method! Go find me something similar in that affected delivery, in that great pomp, and amid that vain display of eloquence; find me something similar. Very rarely do we see a single person converted by such preaching in the course of Advent and Lent year after year. We observe this in Paris. What restitution do we see from all those eloquent sermons? Do you see a large number of conversions, Messieurs? Alas, it

would be hard to find one, a single one! Yet, by the grace God has been pleased to give this insignificant Company with its little method, one mission results in such great success and wonderful conversions that nothing like it has ever been seen or heard.

“Lastly, Messieurs, I cite experience—your own experience, Messieurs; what progress have you not made wherever you preached according to this method? What conversions have we not seen? A man and woman who were leading a bad life came to you, saying, ‘Ah, Monsieur, we’re giving up our bad practices! Ah, Monsieur, from this very moment we’re separating forever! Ah, Monsieur, I promise you I’ll never see her again!’ What’s that? What’s that? Grudges, deep-rooted antagonisms which seemed to have no remedies for the future, the greatest divisions—haven’t people been reconciled by the power God has given to your sermons preached according to the method? In a word, there’s no sinner whom grace has touched by means of the little method, who hasn’t come to cast himself at your feet, crying for mercy. You know this better than I; I’m not telling you something you haven’t seen and, furthermore, done.

“*O Dieu!* What good results this method has produced wherever we’ve gone! What progress! How much greater they’d be if I, a miserable man, had not prevented them by my sins! Alas, wretch that I am! I humbly ask pardon of God for this. O Savior, forgive this wretched sinner, who spoils all Your plans, who opposes and contradicts them everywhere; in Your infinite mercy, forgive me for all the obstacles I’ve placed in the way of the good results of the method You have inspired, and of the glory You would have received without me, a wretched man. Forgive me for the scandal I give in this matter, as in all that concerns Your service. And you, Messieurs, please forgive me for the bad example I’m always giving you and for which I ask your pardon.

“The last reason—which I’ll explain very briefly—is drawn from our salvation, for which we’re here and in this world. Alas, Messieurs, how afraid I am! What great danger there is for those poor preachers who limit themselves to beautiful ideas and the way they put their thoughts together, choosing words that are in vogue but making little account of what would be most helpful. Ah, how I fear for those peo-

ple! And what makes me more fearful in this matter is Holy Scripture; you know all its words—I don't, but I know the sense of it, and here it is: a prophet cries woe to the person who, being in a high place from which he catches sight of the ravenous wolf entering the fold, seeing this enemy doesn't shout with all his might, 'Save yourselves, save yourselves, here comes the enemy, save yourselves, save yourselves!' Woe to that man, if he doesn't cry out as loud as he can, 'Save yourselves!' But that's exactly what those preachers do when they don't consider the benefit of their hearers above all things; even though they see the enemy, they don't breathe a word; they sing you pleasant tunes instead of sounding the trumpet, 'we're going to be lost; look, here comes the enemy, let's save ourselves, let's save ourselves!'

"Ah, Messieurs, how fortunate we are, since our method diverts us far from those perils; but beware, beware, if we disdain it! Let's be very careful that, to satisfy our vanity on that point, we don't lay ourselves open to the curse of the prophet, *vae, vae*; woe to that man! Why go into the pulpit, why preach, if not to lead people to save themselves, to cry out, 'There's the enemy, there he is, watch out, save yourselves, save yourselves!' If we distort the word of God, if we use it to show off or to be esteemed so that people will say, 'Now there's an eloquent man who's very capable; he has depth and talent,' will we not, alas, bring upon ourselves the curse of false prophets? Won't God have good reason to forsake us in the end because we weren't concerned about abusing the most holy things to give our vanity a little gratification, since we will have used the most efficacious means of converting souls to satisfy our own ambition? Alas, Messieurs! What great reason we have to fear and, in a certain sense, to despair of the salvation of those persons who change remedies into poison and have no other method of treating the word of God than that furnished them by prudence of the flesh, their moods, what's fashionable, and their whims! And God grant that it's not from vanity and pride! God grant that it's not pride! O Savior! Don't allow anyone in this Little Company, totally at Your service, to fall into such great danger that he ends up by abusing Your holy word in that way! No, Lord, we hope from Your goodness that in Your mercy You won't allow that.

“So then, we’ve just seen four reasons why we must be strongly attached to the method of preaching that God has been pleased to give the Company. The first reason is its great effectiveness, since it omits nothing that should be brought forward to persuade people, which the other methods don’t do—at least not as effectively. The second is that it’s Our Lord’s manner of preaching, which the Apostles followed. The third is that its effects are marvelous; it produces excellent results; all of you have had experience of this. Lastly, there’s the great danger of being damned, to which we’re exposed if we act otherwise; in addition, we might end up being less helpful to those who listen to us. Let’s not dwell any longer on this; you know all that better than I do, Messieurs, and you’d express it much better than I, much more emphatically and efficaciously. The word of God in the mouth of a miserable, earthly person like me has no effect. So then, after those serious reasons we’ve just seen, there’s nothing—except perhaps my own great imperfections—that can hinder us from being closely attached to the little method. Is there any other that’s more suitable, easier, and better, Messieurs? If you know of any, do me the favor of telling me; tell me, Messieurs, is there any better one? Personally, I know of none, and I’m sure that all of you are quite convinced of this from what I’ve just said to you about it. I’m the only man—wretch that I am—who spoils everything, who can’t adopt this holy practice; but, with the help of God, I’ll strive to learn it and to imitate some members of the Company to whom God has given this special gift and who use this holy method in a wonderful way.

“Let’s move on to the second point. In what does the method we’re discussing consist? What is it; what’s the method? It’s a virtue which helps us in our sermons to retain a certain disposition and style adapted to the level of our listeners and for their greatest benefit. That’s what it is, that’s its essence and nature.

“It’s a virtue; our method is a virtue, a virtue, an order; but this word *order* seems too broad, not exact enough; *latius patet*,⁹ so let’s call it a virtue, even though it’s a method, for virtue is found in

⁹*It extends more broadly.*

order, but not every method is virtue. That's why I say that our method is a virtue because virtue disposes us to good, and this method also disposes us to good, for, by observing it, we preach in a way helpful to everyone and adapt ourselves to the capacity and level of our audience. Our method is also a virtue because it's the daughter of charity, the queen of virtues. Charity causes us to adjust to everyone so that we can become helpful to everyone, and the method, which incorporates this lesson of charity, does the same.

"Moreover, I myself don't know very well in what this method consists; but, Messieurs, I think all of you know it and its characteristics, thank God. It causes us to be very simple in our talks, as simple as we can be, speaking very familiarly, in such a way that even the least intelligent person can understand us, without our resorting to distorted language, or words that are too popular, but using common language clearly, purely, and simply, without affectation. In this way it seeks only the comfort and convenience of the listeners; it stimulates, it instructs, it enkindles the heart, it easily turns people away from vice and persuades them to love virtue, producing the best effects wherever it is used well.

"'But is that what the method involves, Monsieur?' Yes, Messieurs, effects, characteristics, definition, and nature—it's in these things that the method precisely and principally consists; but, since we don't have time to go into detail and get down to the fine points, and because I myself, wretched man that I am, don't know them—I who have reached this age without being able to learn this method because of my laziness, stupidity, and ignorance, so vulgar and stupid am I, a dumb animal, a coarse brute, ah, what a poor beast—M. Portail, who's supposed to speak to us tomorrow, will go into particulars with us about it and teach us what to do to practice it well. He'll be so good as to do that. I'm asking him to kindly speak on this method; he's well versed in it and will be good enough to teach it to us.

"What's that? The clock is striking three quarters past the hour. Please bear with me a little longer, Messieurs, wretch that I am. So then, let's say something on the third point; let's see what means we can use to adopt such a useful method. For a man who has in view

only the glory of God and the salvation of souls, it's really easy to begin to do this. When we try to refer everything to those goals, it's easy to follow the method, which is expressly for that purpose. But it's a question of making ourselves believe in it; we have to be determined to gain greater esteem for it. If I follow this method, people might say, 'What a poor man he is; he should say something beautiful; he has to use another approach. Come now, come now! He really has to preach differently.' *Eh bien!* What's all this fanfare? Is he trying to show that he's a fine public speaker, a good theologian? That's strange because, with all that, he's taking the wrong road. Perhaps he'll be admired by a few persons who hardly understand him; but, that's not the right way to win the esteem of wise persons.

"To pass for an intelligent person and to have the reputation of being a very eloquent man, you have to be convinced of what you want the listener to adopt, and lead him away from what he has to avoid; and those priests do just the opposite. Are they to pass for good orators before prudent men? No doubt if you ask one of them, 'Why do you preach? For what purpose do you proclaim the word of God?' he'll reply, 'First of all, to convert; second, to disengage people from vice and incline them to virtue.' To convert people is their goal; that, they say, is what their objective is; that's what they should aim at—I don't say obtain, for that doesn't depend on them—but in all their talks, they, on their part, should say and do what they think is suitable for attaining their goal. And when a man has said everything appropriate for persuading others, then he's a preacher, a good preacher; he's achieved his goal, he's done well. But that doesn't consist in picking and choosing his words, composing fine sentences, expressing in an unusual way the ease of his ideas, proclaiming his discourse in a high-pitched tone of voice, a declamatory tone that goes over the heads of the people. Do those persons achieve their goal? Do they really win others over to love of devotion? Are the people touched, and do they then hasten to do penance? Do great conversions result? Far from it! Far from it! Yet, those are the pretensions of those great orators, those are their pretensions! Or else they were aiming at acquiring a reputation for themselves and having people say, 'This man really speaks well; he's eloquent, he has beautiful thoughts, he ex-

presses himself in a pleasing manner.' That's the only fruit of his sermon. *O Sauveur!* Is that your intention, Messieurs? So you go into the pulpit, not to preach God but yourselves, and—what a crime this is!—to use something as holy as the word of God to nurture and stir up your own vanity! *O Sauveur! Divin Sauveur!* We must then, Messieurs, we must then, in the first place, have the right intention, not wanting or having in mind anything in this work but what God is asking of us, aiming only at the conversion of our listeners and an increase in God's glory; and once we've purified our intention in this way, it will be very easy for us to adopt the most useful method we have for that, as we see and experience every day.

"Another means: *attende tibi*;¹⁰ attend to yourself, don't undo by your actions the progress you've made by preaching; don't destroy on the one hand everything being built up on the other; we have to preach mainly by good example, good example, being faithful to regulations and living as good Missioners, for otherwise, Messieurs, we do nothing, we do nothing; and for someone who might be living a disorderly life, this method might do more harm than good; apart from the fact that he can't practice it, at least for any length of time, it's totally contrary to living like a free spirit. We ourselves must have true sentiments of devotion and put it into practice in order to help others conceive true sentiments of devotion. If a man doesn't have a high regard for virtue and great love for his ministry, it's certain that he'll never really achieve it. How can someone who's careless himself, not obeying any regulations and living as a free spirit, help others to turn away from this? That's a travesty. People will say to him, *Medice, cura te ipsum*.¹¹ So, that's clear; nothing is more obvious. So then, *attende tibi*: we have to keep an eye on ourselves first of all and observe the practice of the regulations and customs of our vocation, since that's how we do God's Will. *Attende tibi*. This is another means of rapidly acquiring that excellent method of preaching.

¹⁰Cf. 1 Tim 4:16. (NAB)

¹¹*Physician, cure yourself*. Cf. Lk 4:23. (NAB)

“A third, very efficacious means is to love this holy method, really love it. Why don’t we use this method? It’s because we don’t love it, we prefer to follow our moods, our imagination, and the rules of I don’t know what secular person; we have an aversion for this method, we don’t love it. I’m afraid, Messieurs, that we give only lip service to the good things about it, but in our hearts, in our hearts, oh . . . ! ‘I don’t know . . . I’m afraid this method doesn’t suit us, that we find it bothersome and inconvenient, that it’s difficult for us.’ Ah, Messieurs! And this method has been given by God, it comes from God; He himself practiced it; the Apostles retained it; it’s the method of the Apostles and of the Son of God himself, the method of the Son of God, the method of Eternal Wisdom; and we reject it, we don’t want it, we don’t like it! We who profess in a very special way to follow Our Lord and who call ourselves His servants, we despise and refuse His own method, which He taught us and gave to us! *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* What must people be saying of us? That we love what God hates and hate what God loves. *O Sauveur!* Ah, Messieurs! Instead, let’s all be united unanimously this evening for that purpose, so that every one of us may love this method more and more. Would to God that, by His grace, I might have obtained that favor this evening, which I ask of you by all the love you have for the glory of the Son of God, and by the depth of His mercy!

“Ah, I’m a wretched man who doesn’t know how to keep things short; bear with me, Messieurs! Would to God that we might all have one same heart, closely united in observing this divine method! M. Portail, I’m united with you for this purpose, you to whom God has given it, and to M. Alméras, who also has this gift; I’m united with you with all my heart and solemnly promise to do my best in future to adopt this divine method.

“‘But, Monsieur, would you allow me to state some objections to that and would you be willing now to listen to our reasons?’ Ah, would to God that I had the time; I’d willingly listen to you! Yes, of course, let’s take a quick look at it, as time permits; let’s clear up the difficulties the human mind can create regarding what we’ve just said.

“‘How can we use this method and observe its three points in dealing with all kinds of subject matter! Apart from the fact that it

would be extremely distasteful and annoying, that's difficult—even impossible—without taking a risk.' So it is; so it is. Using the same method would be boring in the long run; the human spirit is so fickle that it soon tires of even the best things. But, apart from the fact that our missions are short, you can disguise it in such a way that people won't see your strategy and discover your method, sometimes by changing the order of the points, putting one before the other; sometimes having only two. There are many other ways that don't come to mind just now. Furthermore, the method is different for different topics: there's one method for dealing with the feast of a saint, another for discussing a Mystery, another for a parable, another for explaining a text, another for the Gospel of the day and the other topics for sermons. M. Portail, who knows well all these ways of preaching appropriately, will kindly explain all those methods to you because I myself don't know them, but, with the help of God, I want to learn them from him and from others to whom God has given this gift.

“ ‘But, Monsieur, aren't other methods just as good as that one? We see so many learned, excellent preachers who aren't familiar with your method; yet, they're quite successful and preach very well.' Messieurs, every method can be good and holy; I don't mean to criticize any of them here; God forbid! Furthermore, God uses whomever He pleases and any person who seems good to him to procure His glory: *Potens est de lapidibus istis suscitare filios Abrahae*.¹² He can raise up children of Abraham from these stones. God is all-powerful and, if He chooses, He can use the hardness of this stone to soften the most hardened hearts and lead them to a holy conversion and penance. *O Sauveur!* With all that, Messieurs, how many people do we see converted by all those methods? We have the experience of our own method; you have it, Messieurs; but with those now popular and fashionable you have the experience of the opposite; they always go over people's heads, only skimming or touching the surface. A little noise, that's all there is! So many sermons are preached every day in this large city in the course of so many Advent and Lenten seasons; but find me one man, from among

¹²Cf. Mt 3:9. (NAB)

those very persons who have been listening to those sermons for thirty or forty years, who has become better because of them! *O Sauveur!* You'd have a hard time finding a single individual, a single man converted after listening to all those sermons; and what's that in comparison with the good results we see produced by the little method! That convinces me that, since there are none that produce such great results, neither are there any that are as good and that it should surpass all others—at least among us, who seek only the salvation of souls.

“We know that this is the method of the Son of God and of the Apostles, and the one that very important persons—and not only us, poor wretched men—have used and are still using, and it's the method of the preachers who work miracles and of Bishops and theologians. The Bishop of . . . used to say to me that, even if he were to preach a hundred thousand times, he'd never use any other method. M. de Sales, that great man of God, used to tell me the same, as have so many others, so many others. *O Seigneur!* I'm ashamed to mention them.

“And don't think, Messieurs, that this method is only for the rural areas, for the lower classes, for peasants. Ah! To tell the truth it is quite excellent for the lower classes, but it's also very efficacious for better-educated listeners, for cities, and in Paris, in Paris itself. During the mission given at Saint-Germain, people came from everywhere, from every district of this large city; we saw people from every parish, including persons of quality and theologians—even theologians. We preached to all this large crowd using only the little method. When the Bishop of Boulogne,¹³ preached, he never used

¹³François Perrochel, a cousin of Jean-Jacques Olier, was born in Paris on October 18, 1602. Animated by the spirit of M. Vincent, he was one of the devout, zealous priests who worked under the saint's direction and gave missions in several places, especially in Auvergne, Joigny, and the faubourg Saint-Germain. He was a member of the Tuesday Conferences and was present at the meetings in which retreats for ordinands were organized. As Bishop-elect of Boulogne, he was invited to give conferences to the ordinands at the Bons-Enfants and was so successful that the Queen wanted to hear him. Moved by his words, she gave the Saint a generous donation to help defray the retreat expenses. Perrochel was consecrated in the church of Saint-Lazare on June 11, 1645. His episcopate was one of the most fruitful and glorious known to the Boulogne diocese. In 1675, worn out by age and infirmity, and unable to govern his diocese properly, the Bishop resigned; he died on April 8, 1682. (Cf. Eugène-François Van Drival, *Histoire des évêques de Boulogne* [Boulogne-sur-Mer: Berger frères, 1852].)

any other. And what good results we had! *Dieu!* What good results! They made general confessions, just as in the villages, and did so with great blessings. *Or sus, Dieu!* Did anyone ever see as many people converted by all those polished sermons? *Caeli caelorum!* They go right over their heads. The only conversion that takes place is that the listeners say, ‘Yes, that man certainly knows a lot; he says some beautiful things.’

“But let’s go further: the little method is for the Court, good for the Court. The little method has been used twice at the Court and was, if I dare say, well received there. It’s true that the first time there was great opposition to it—great opposition; nevertheless, it had very good results, very good results. The Bishop of Alet¹⁴ was the preacher again. By the grace of God, with the little method he managed to overcome every opposition. The second time, one of our own men, M. Louistre,¹⁵ did the preaching, and there was no objection to it, thank God; the little method. I, a wretched man, dare say that the little method triumphed there; we saw marvelous results there. At the Court, the little method at the Court! And then, you say it’s only for uncultured people and for villages. In Paris, in Paris, and at the Court, at the Court, everywhere, there’s no better method and none as efficacious; for, Messieurs, the best method is the one that uses everything necessary to win over our listeners; and ours leaves nothing behind that could be suitable for this end. You decide. So let’s all adopt this humble but powerful method.

“Here’s a fourth means, after which I’m going to stop: it’s to ask God fervently and often for it; it’s a gift of God so we have to ask for it. . . .

“Ah, it’s striking quarter after! *O Sauveur!* I’ve finished, I’ve finished. So then, there are four means for adopting this method: purity of intention, watching carefully over ourselves—*attende tibi*—love for this method, love, love for it—and asking God often to give it to those whom He has chosen to advance His glory by this

¹⁴Nicolas Pavillon.

¹⁵Jean Louistre was born in Nantes, in the Chartres diocese, entered the Congregation of the Mission on March 14, 1637, at the age of twenty-four, and took his vows on March 14, 1642.

means, since, by His mercy, there are several of them in the Company. Blessed be God!

“Divine Savior, You who came to earth to preach to us in simplicity and to teach us this holy method by Your own example, we humbly entreat You to help all of us to adopt Your spirit of simplicity and to give us this holy method by Your grace, so that, by this means, we may effectively proclaim Your holy word and carry it throughout the world like Your disciples, to whom You gave it. O Savior, gentle Savior, spread this spirit of method upon us. Let’s hope that, by doing our part, God will grant us this grace. M. Portail will kindly speak to us much better tomorrow on this holy method.

“And now I’ve finished. Blessed be God! There are many things that could be said, but it’s too late. I always go on too long, I always waste time, I’m a burden, like a big brute.

“I don’t think anything can prevent us now from taking on this method of preaching. Will it be pleasure? *O Dieu!* That, more than anything else, helps us to preach with greater satisfaction. I don’t think that all the pleasures in the world can equal the slightest one we get from this method. What greater pleasure can a preacher have than to see his hearers come to him, to see them weep, as has often happened to you yourselves? Isn’t it true that you often see your audience in tears? And when you want to leave, you have to sneak away; isn’t it true, Monsieur, that they run after you? Please answer me honestly, tell us how it happened, is that the case? ‘Yes, Monsieur, we don’t know what to do to get away from the people.’ *O Sauveur!* Is there any greater satisfaction in the world than that? To see all your people visibly moved by your preaching! What other satisfaction can a speaker have than to get what he’s seeking! What greater pleasure is there? And from your own experience, Messieurs, that’s what is obtained every day by the little method.

“To what can you aspire? The conversion of the people? Eh! After your sermons preached with this method they all flock to you, so convinced, that they’re ready to do whatever you tell them. What greater pleasure, what greater pleasure! *O Sauveur!*

“Do you want to acquire honor? Is there any method in the world in which more of it is to be found? It shouldn’t be used for that pur-

pose; that would be a diabolical intention. But, Messieurs, is there any greater honor to be acquired for us than to be treated like the Apostles, like the Son of God? Alas! We're given the same praise that was given to Jesus Christ. 'Blessed are the wombs that bore you!' people say to the Missioners. When they leave, the people cry after them, 'Blessed are the breasts that nursed you! How happy your mothers must be!' *O Sauveur!* What more was said of the Son of God? And all these praises and many others that bother you are said to Missioners, when they use only the little method. So then, there's a great deal of honor involved and pleasure to acquire in this; however, that's not why we'll adopt it, but for love of God, from whom we get it.

“ ‘But this method is so lowly! What will people say of me for always preaching like that? For whom will they take me? In the end, every single one of them will despise me, and I'll lose my honor.’ You'll lose your honor! *O Sauveur!* Is it losing your honor to preach in the way Jesus Christ himself preached? To treat the word of Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ himself willed to treat it is to have no honor? To speak of God as the Son of God spoke of Him is to lose your honor? *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* So then, Jesus Christ, Word of the Father, had no honor! To preach sermons as you should, in simplicity, in familiar and ordinary speech, as Our Lord did, is to have no honor; and to do otherwise is to be an honorable man? To distort and falsify the word of God is to have honor? To dissimulate the word of God—the sacred word of God—so pretentiously, to put a mask on the word of God and make it look like a courtesan filled with vanity? *O Sauveur, Divin Sauveur!* What's all that? What is it, Messieurs? To say that preaching the Gospel as Jesus Christ did is to lose one's honor! That's as much as saying that Jesus Christ, who was Eternal Wisdom, didn't really know how to treat His own word, didn't understand it clearly, and should have acted in a way other than He did. *O Sauveur*, what blasphemy! And that's what's said, if not outright at least tacitly and in the heart; if not outwardly before others, at least before God, who sees the heart; and people dare to utter those horrible blasphemies before God, who sees the heart, and to say those things to His face! And they're ashamed be-

fore others! Before God! O Savior, merciful Savior! Alas, Messieurs! You see clearly that it's blasphemy to think and to say that we lose our honor by preaching as the Son of God preached, as He came to teach us, as the Holy Spirit instructed the Apostles to do.

"One day I asked M. X, 'But, Monsieur, please tell me how Saint Vincent Ferrer preached and converted so many people, attracting such crowds from everywhere, with the result that they had to send escorts after him?' 'Here's how,' he replied. 'That great man preached plainly and simply, making himself understood clearly by everyone.' *O Sauveur!* O simplicity, you're really very persuasive! Simplicity converts everyone. It's quite certain that, to convince and win over the human spirit, we have to act simply; we usually don't manage to do this by using beautiful, set speeches; they shout aloud and make a lot of noise but do nothing else. All those beautiful, studied speeches ordinarily touch only the inferior part of us. Perhaps they cause fear by shouting in I don't know what kind of a tone; they heat up the blood and stir up desires, but all that is in the inferior part, not the superior part; reason and intellect are in no way persuaded. And all those impulses of the inferior part do nothing, if the understanding isn't convinced; if reason doesn't grasp it, everything else soon fades, soon fades, and the preaching remains useless. So, long live simplicity and the little method, which is the most excellent one and the one by which greater honor can be acquired and the mind persuaded, without all that shouting that bothers the listeners! Eh, Messieurs! That's so true that, if a man now wants to be considered a good preacher in all the churches in Paris and at the Court, he has to preach like that, with no affectation whatsoever. And people say of the man who preaches in that way and who preaches the best, 'That man works wonders, he preaches like a missionary, like a missionary, like an Apostle.' *O Sauveur!* And M. X told me that eventually we have to come to that. And in truth, to preach otherwise is the height of impertinence, it's trying to preach ourselves and not Jesus Christ.

"He preaches like a missionary! O Savior! You have granted the little, insignificant Company this grace of inspiring it with a method everyone wants to follow; we thank You for this with all our

strength. Ah, Messieurs! Let's not make ourselves unworthy of this grace, which everyone esteems so highly that people say of an excellent preacher, 'He preaches like a missionary.' Alas! How would it be if we were the only ones to despise it! Wouldn't God have good reason to complain that we make so little account of this great gift He's given us in order to share His inspirations with us and, through us, with everyone!

"*Or sus*, blessed be God! I ask you, Messieurs, to offer Mass for this, and you, Brothers, to receive your next Communion for this intention."

135. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 22, 1655

M. Vincent recommended to the prayers of the Company a few persons who had asked for them, among others, the Bishop of Luçon,² who was seriously ill. "He's a Bishop who has been very kind to us and has always shown great love for the Company; he has a large share of God's goodness. In gratitude, we'll ask God to give him what's most fitting for His glory.

"I also ask your prayers for our priests in foreign lands. A few days ago, I learned that M. Le Blanc³ had been released; it was the Principal of the Scots College who told me. I'm not sure if that's the case; I've received no letters about it. We'll thank God for everything about this, for we'll keep asking His Divine Goodness to give him the strength to bear whatever Divine Providence will be pleased to allow to happen to him, to endure the sufferings to be encountered if he has been released—and even death, if God wishes

Conference 135. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 75. A shorter version of this same talk, written somewhat differently, is in *Repetitions of Prayer*, MS, f° 29.

¹*Subheading*: Illness of the Bishop of Luçon; news of Missioners in Scotland, Barbary, Madagascar, and Genoa; exhortation to zeal and detachment.

²Pierre Nivelles; he died on November 10, 1661.

³Francis White.

that of him—and always to be totally resigned to His good pleasure. All he'd have to say to be freed entirely is 'I'm not a priest'; but he prefers to die rather than to say 'I'm not a priest.' If he did, they'd let him go immediately, and the door of the prison would be opened to him.

"We're also going to pray for Messrs. Duiguin⁴ and Lumsden, who are working in those parts. *O Sauveur!* What good results they're having there! You'll have to read what's been written about this. The Ladies themselves have collected some documents and letters and are reading them with sentiments of devotion and blessing. *O Sauveur!*

"As for the men in Barbary, the Le Vachers⁵ and the others, who are working under such difficulties with so much to put up with in those lands, and who don't say a word about them, make nothing of them. . . , yet, they have something to suffer from everyone, Turks and slaves, and have to make visits, deal with, and talk to those poor prisoners, and to run here and there, but they don't mention this at all; on the contrary, we see from their letters that they're content to suffer, and they ask for more—they want even more sufferings. *O Sauveur!* Let's ask God to give this spirit to the entire body and heart of the Company. What a great blessing from God, who deigns to make use of this Little Company for that, doing us the honor of suffering for Him in the person of some of our members, in M. Le Blanc and the others! What a great grace He gives us in sending us to carry His word in this way throughout the world!

⁴Dermot Duggan.

⁵Jean and Philippe Le Vacher. For the biographical sketch of Jean Le Vacher, see Conf. 109, n. 1.

Philippe Le Vacher, born in Écouen (Val-d'Oise) on March 23, 1622, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 5, 1643, and took his vows on August 5, 1646. He was part of the first group sent to Ireland in 1646. Recalled to France in 1649, he was sent to Marseilles, where he was ordained a priest on April 2, 1650, and sailed for Algiers as Vicar Apostolic and Vicar-General of Carthage. He returned to France in 1657 to collect alms for the captives. His absence, which was supposed to last only a few months, lasted two years. He set out again in September 1659, reached Barbary, and in 1661 accompanied Bro. Jean Dubourdiou to Algiers, where the latter was destined to replace Jean Barreau, French Consul in that city. Le Vacher paid Barreau's debts, settled a number of business matters, and finally left Barbary in 1662, accompanied by seventy captives whom he had ransomed. He was sent to Fontainebleau, where he led a most exemplary life until August 5, 1679, the day of his death. (Cf. *Noticex*, vol. III, pp. 595-606.)

“There were some religious who had set sail for the place where our Missioners are in Barbary but, once they were there, they encountered such great difficulties that they had to come back home; but, thank God, our men are still there and, by His mercy, are successful in their work. Let’s take care not to make ourselves unworthy of this great grace lest God withdraw it from us. Recently a Cordelier ⁶ said to me, ‘Ah, Monsieur! What a great blessing! *O Dieu!* What progress can be made!’ He asked their General for an Assistant for the men who are in the Indies and the Orient, in order to be able by this means to take care of many needs where they are. He requested this at their General Chapter but was refused for many reasons. So, this Father said with great feeling, ‘Be careful that God doesn’t deprive you of that grace He’s given you and punish you by taking this calling from your group and seeing that no one goes to those lands again!’ He showed those strong feelings about this, saying to me, ‘O Monsieur, the great blessing God has given you of. . . .’ I shouldn’t be saying this.

“Let’s be careful that God doesn’t deprive us of this grace. It has pleased Him to make use of this little corps to carry out His plans. Let’s be like that little peasant who was carrying a sack and, seeing his master kneel down to pray, did the same, with his little sack on his back. When asked what he was doing, he said, ‘I’m asking God to do what you’re requesting of him; I’m a poor idiot, who doesn’t know how to say anything to him, so I’m asking him to listen to you; I’d like to say to Him the things you’re saying, but I can’t; so I’m offering Him whatever you’re saying to Him.’

“Ah, we’re the ones carrying the sack, those poor idiots who don’t know how to say things, those little gleaners who come after the great missionaries. Let’s thank God for being pleased to accept our services; let’s offer Him the great harvests of others with our little handfuls, let’s be always ready to do whatever we can for the service of God and the neighbor. If God has given such a great blessing, that’s not enough; if He gave such beautiful illumination and great grace to that peasant that he deserved to be mentioned in

⁶Franciscan.

history, let's hope that, by doing all we can to contribute to the honor of God in what depends on us, God will do the rest and receive in good part and bless our little labors and offerings.

"He uses whomever He pleases to do great things. Look at our men who are in foreign lands, among others M. Le Blanc; he doesn't say a word; they're not people who have made a display of themselves; and you see the great things God is doing through this servant of His and the others. Let's hope in God and be fully resigned to His Holy Providence.

"We're also going to pray for the others, M. Bourdais and M. Mousnier. *O Sauveur!* A few days ago I was talking to one of those priests who has come back from that country; what did he not say to me about M. Nacquart!⁷ What a great servant of God! With what feeling he spoke to me about him! How much good he did! *O Sauveur!* What a great loss this servant of God is, but what a great gain as well! *Sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum*. That makes me hope that his martyrdom—for he died for God—will be the seed of Christians, which God, in view of his death, will give us the grace to bring to fruition. And about M. Gondrée,⁸ *O Dieu!* What sentiments, what sentiments! I always have that man before me, his great

⁷Charles Nacquart, born in Treslon (Marne) in 1617, entered the Congregation of the Mission on April 6, 1640. After ordination he was sent to Richelieu. Designated for the first group to be sent to Madagascar, he arrived there on December 4, 1648. He had learned the native language so well on the voyage to Madagascar that in a short time he was able to draft a brief summary of Christian doctrine, *Petit catéchisme, avec les prières du matin et du soir*. . . . (Paris: Georges Josse, 1657). (Cf. also Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. IX. §5 and §6.) A new edition of Nacquart's work, edited by Ludwig Munthe, Élie Rajaonarison, and Désiré Ranaivosoa, was published under the title of *Le catéchisme malgache de 1657* (Antananarivo: Egede Instituttet, 1987). He converted several Protestants, baptized seventy-seven Malagasy, and regularized the situation of the French who were living with indigenous women. He evangelized not only Fort-Dauphin, but also the entire interior within a radius of roughly thirty miles (cf. III, 538, 570, and 592). Exhausted by so much work, Nacquart died on May 29, 1650. In vol. IX of *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission* are found his letters, diary, and testament, taken from old copies preserved in the Archives of the Mission, Paris.

⁸Nicolas Gondrée, born in Assigny (Seine-Maritime), entered the Congregation of the Mission as a subdeacon on April 11, 1644, at 24 years of age. During his novitiate he was ordained a deacon and was sent to Saintes. In 1646 he returned to Paris and was ordained a priest. In 1648 he volunteered for Madagascar, where he arrived on December 4; but God, satisfied with his good will, called him to himself on May 26, 1649. Saint Vincent had a high esteem of Gondrée's virtue and considered him "one of the best subjects in the Company." (Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 43-56.)

gentleness and modesty; I still remember the fine talks that man of God gave us amid the flurry of getting ready to set sail. *O Sauveur!* Blessed be God! Blessed be God!

“*Or sus*, let’s ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, that disposes us to go as He went and as He would have gone, if His Eternal Wisdom had deemed it advisable to work for the conversion of poor nations. He sent the Apostles to do that; he sends us, like them, to bring fire everywhere. *Ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur*;⁹ to bring this divine fire, this fire of love and of fear of God everywhere, throughout the world: to Barbary, to the Indies, to Japan. That’s what’s meant by *Sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum*. They tormented the Christians there, they pursued them everywhere; with what rage they put them to death in a cruel manner! But, in the end, by the mercy of God, things turned around, the cruel King died, and the one who succeeded him put no one to death; on the contrary, he allowed the Portuguese to trade, and priests to go there, and people felt completely safe living in that place without any danger, by the grace of God.

“Ah, Messieurs! Let’s all ask God fervently for this spirit for the whole Company, a spirit that will take us everywhere, with the result that, when someone sees one or two Missioners, they can say, ‘Those are apostolic persons ready to go to the four corners of the world carrying the word of God.’ Let’s ask God to grant us a heart like that; there are some who have it, by the grace of God, and all are servants of God, but to go there and not to be deterred! *O Sauveur!* That’s really something! We must have a heart like that, everyone having the same heart, detached from all things, so that we may have perfect trust in the mercy of God, without wondering, or worrying, or losing courage. ‘Will I have this item in that country? How will I get it?’ *O Sauveur!* God will never fail us! Ah, Messieurs! *O Dieu!* When we hear talk of the glorious death of those who are

⁹*I have come to light a fire on the earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited!* Cf. Lk 12:49. (NAB)

there, who wouldn't want to be in their place? Who wouldn't want to die like them, to be assured of an eternal reward! *O Sauveur!* Is there anything more desirable! So then, let's not be bound to this or that; let's be courageous! Let's go wherever God may call us, He will be our provider, let's not fear anything. *Or sus*, blessed be God! Let's all pray for that intention.

"They've written me from Genoa that they need our help and are asking for our prayers; we're obligated to do this; we had to send and return all our priests who have passed through there and have been welcomed in a way . . . God knows. Good M. Blatiron can't do enough for them; he writes me nothing about it, but I was well aware that he had really been a help to them."

136. - METHOD TO BE FOLLOWED IN PREACHING

August 22, 1655

"Messieurs, this will be a continuation of the topic already begun, namely, on the method of preaching. From what I've heard, you've made a great deal of progress, by the grace of God. I think it will be well for us to do here what we did previously for the same topic; the Bishop of Boulogne,¹ the Bishop of Alet,² M. Ricard, and all of us were there; even a few priests from Paris came. And, very simply, we would practice just as we're doing now. We'd choose a topic, and each would give the motives he had on it; then we'd move on to acts and from there to the means. That's what we did, and each man very simply gave his modest opinion. Sometimes we composed a sermon on the spot, the Bishop of Boulogne on one side, the Bishop of Alet on the other, and M. Portail as well, for he knows that [method]; I'm the only one who has never learned any-

Conference 136. - Manuscript of Conferences. This conference was given after Vespers on August 22, 1655, at a special meeting held on Sunday in Saint-Lazare Hall.

¹François Perrochel.

²Nicolas Pavillon.

thing worthwhile. We'd see how to proceed to treat the subject well, how to be very convincing—always plainly, with simplicity; and that's what we'd do.

"The Oratorian Fathers have the custom among themselves of practicing preaching in that way—four of them each day. Isn't that true, M. Alméras, you who've been in Rome where that's done?"

"Yes, Monsieur," said M. Alméras, "four of them preach for half an hour each."

"You're saying that four of them get in the pulpit and preach, each for half an hour on four different subjects; isn't that the case, M. Martin?"

"Yes, Monsieur," said M. Martin, "I agree."

"So four of them preach; each has half an hour for various topics; one on the Gospel, another on some Mystery, another on the life of a saint, and the other on some virtue, just like that, in a low pulpit. There's also a high pulpit, where sermons are preached; ordinarily the Capucins and some Order—I forget which one—preach in the high pulpit in the church of the Oratorian Fathers; but the latter preach only from that little low pulpit."

"Monsieur," said M. Alméras, "that pulpit isn't so low; it has seven or eight steps, almost like the one in the new building."

"*Eh bien!* So they preach only in that pulpit, in a simple manner, in familiar language and not otherwise, very informally, for two hours a day, each taking half an hour. And that's the most popular devotion in Rome. Everyone goes there. The greatest piety is at the Oratorian Fathers, where these little sermons are given simply and familiarly and not otherwise; and if someone preaches in another way, he's informed of this and corrected, so as to keep the method of blessed Philip their father.³ They're corrected when they fail to do this, and by this means they're kept in check."

"Monsieur," said M. Alméras, "may I say something I find very edifying and useful in this regard?"

"Yes, Monsieur, go ahead. You've seen all that, Monsieur, so please tell us."

³Saint Philip Neri (1515-95), Founder of the Oratory in Rome, was canonized in 1622.

“Monsieur,” said M. Alméras, “one time—I think it was under blessed Philip Neri; it seems to me he was still alive—there was a man who gave a beautiful sermon that didn’t go beyond his half hour, but the style was a little more lofty than usual; something made him get carried away. Nevertheless, everyone admired it, and his preaching was even helpful. It was helpful but a little more elevated than usual. Afterward the Superior said to him, ‘You’ve really preached very well to us; I thought what you said was beautiful; please preach it to us once again; it’s very beautiful.’ So, he made him preach on the same topic the next day and for eight or ten days following that, with the result that everyone said, ‘That’s the priest of the one sermon, the one-sermon Father.’ ”

“Very good, very good,” said M. Vincent, “that teaches us clearly how those priests value simplicity and should stir us up to do the same in order to keep our method simple—not like I preach: crying out loud, clapping my hands, leaning halfway out of the pulpit. Those Fathers preach with so much restraint that they wouldn’t dare do that and would be severely reprimanded for it. Nevertheless, all Rome goes there, and they have all the devotion. It’s because that’s the best way to proceed, quite simply and informally, without getting carried away like me, wretched man.

“A second example, which shows us how careful we must be to maintain our method, is that of the Huguenots; the other was that of a saint, and this one is that of the Huguenots. So, Calvin invented his own method of preaching: take a book, as Our Lord did, read it, and explain it in the literal and spiritual sense; then draw some moral teachings from it. That’s Calvin’s method, which the Huguenots have been using in their sermons ever since; and, even today, every three months the Huguenots give conferences . . . No, that’s not the word . . . (someone was suggesting *consistory*), not a consistory either. Ah! Here it is: symposiums. At their symposiums, then, where several ministers meet every three months, they discuss the way to preach, and those who aren’t very familiar with it learn it. The others preach, and sitting here (pointing to his right) or there (pointing to the other side) beside the pulpit, they note whether the person preaches well according to their style, and they correct one

another; those who don't know this method have nothing to do. They still report on it at the consistory.

"Eh, Messieurs! If human prudence—what am I saying?—if the inventiveness of the devil and heresy act with so much precaution in order to keep themselves in check, what means should we not use to preserve our holy method, since they, through purely human motives, work so hard for a vain, useless thing! *O Sauveur!* I think it will be a good idea, then, as we've already done in the past, to take a topic, and each one will state his reason briefly. This would have to be written down. Brother, don't you have a writing case over there? . . . Go get some paper; you'll find some in our room. . . . That door is locked; go to the other side.

"What topic shall we choose? Let's take humility for today; each individual will first mention his reasons in a few words, without elaborating; a sentence will do, give a reason briefly.

"M. Alméras, what reason can you give to incline us to humility?"

After M. Alméras put forth a reason to incite us to humility, M. Vincent asked the senior priests, who were next in line, for another reason, then everyone else, in the order in which they were seated. Each one gave a reason, or said he had only ones that had already been mentioned, and did so in very few words.

After the senior priests had suggested reasons, he moved on to acts of humility, having given its definition beforehand.

While they were suggesting acts, he said, "You must always go into detail; you've seen that; and that's the result, getting down to particulars, giving the circumstances, the place and the time when this or that act has to be practiced."

When M. Alméras said something to him, he replied, "Yes, Monsieur, that's where we fail the most in our conferences, when people speak well in a general way but stop there; that's not enough; as far as possible, particular acts must be specified and indicated. At those conferences where they work wonders, there are some who have this gift from God of getting down to particulars when they speak; all eyes are on them, and that, giving details in such or such a circumstance, is what's the most beneficial and has great results. If,

after that, however, someone happens to express some beautiful thoughts, bringing forth strong reasons and quoting many things from the Fathers and the Councils, all that is fine, but it wipes out all the good that the other, by going into detail, had impressed on souls. It's like when you've written something down and someone comes by with a sponge and erases everything; there's no trace of it; everything is wiped out. In the same way the mind loses the good sentiments it had, and the holy thoughts vanish. This lofty discourse replaces them with others, which wipe out the first ones. You must, Messieurs, you must always get down to particulars, explaining the acts clearly in detail; that's where excellent results are usually found. The mind suggests one act to itself in a certain circumstance at the time, and another in another circumstance; always specifically, as far as possible."

Next, we went on to the means of acquiring humility, and after many had been suggested, he said toward the end, "I thank God for the graces He has given you and for the many good and beautiful things you've just said. We'll see if it will be necessary to continue with this. Blessed be God!"

137. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 24, 1655

M. Vincent strongly recommended to our prayers four Negro boys, whom M. de Flacourt,² a citizen of this city of Paris, just ar-

Conference 137. - The first part of this instruction, as far as "When a coadjutor Brother accused himself," is taken from Repetitions of Prayer, MS. f^o 30; the second part is from *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, p. 107.

¹*Subheading:* News of four Malagasy boys brought to Saint-Lazare by M. de Flacourt; reprimand to a coadjutor Brother.

²Étienne de Flacourt, born in Orléans in 1607, had many difficulties governing the colony of Madagascar in the name of the Company of the Indies (1648-55), due especially to the colonists who tried several times to kill him. After his return to France, he worked in the administration of the Company. Besides a history of Madagascar, he also wrote a *Dictionnaire de la langue de Madagascar, avec un petit recueil de noms et dictons propres des choses qui sont d'une mesme espèce* [Paris: G. Josse, 1658], which he dedicated to Saint Vincent.

rived from the island of Madagascar, had brought back with him. He had them sent here from Nantes to be presented to M. Vincent so that it might please the Divine Majesty to grant them the favor of becoming good Christians and true Catholics. He said that if God were pleased to grant them this grace, the four of them would be all that was needed to convert their entire region and the people of their race. Therefore, M. Vincent recommended that the Company give them good example and not to make a diversion of them. He said he wasn't sure who he could put in charge of instructing and guiding them, and that an angel would be needed for that because, from what he had noticed from their temperament, he saw how difficult it would be for these children to devote themselves, as desirable, to the practice of the Christian virtues. He also questioned whether they could be put to study or if they should be taught a trade. The Jesuits were always very hesitant about admitting people from those countries of the Indies to Holy Orders because they recognized that men from those regions are usually not endowed with the qualities required of a priest, and they admitted only those who were the children of either a European father or mother. For example, a Portuguese man who was in the Indies marries an Indian woman; or an Indian man marries a Portuguese woman; the children of those marriages have been admitted and even given titles and have sometimes been accepted among them.

Note: the oldest of these black children, who doesn't know his own age, seems to be around fifteen or sixteen years old and has not yet been baptized. The three others, who are smaller and younger, were baptized in their own country by the late M. Nacquart, Priest of the Mission, the first member of the Company to have gone to the Indies, accompanied by the late M. Gondrée, also a Priest of our Company.

When a coadjutor Brother accused himself publicly of some fault, M. Vincent said, "Ah, Brother! It's true that this is a serious fault, a serious fault and one that I'm not sure is committed even by poor people in the world, i.e., to tear up some clothing! To tear up a gift given to you! You should be glad if it wasn't as you desired! But to rip it to pieces! *O Sauveur!* O Brother, what a serious fault! A se-

rious fault! Humble yourself profoundly for that. Has anyone ever seen a man from the country, a peasant, tear up the clothing someone gave him, no matter how poor it was! And you, Brother, you tear up the clothing given to you; perhaps you need it, and instead of accepting it gladly and using it, regardless of what it's like, you rip it apart! Ah, my poor Brother, what a serious fault that is! Humble yourself profoundly for it.

“But didn't this fault stem from another, even worse fault, that you committed the day before? Oh, Brother, shall I mention it? *O Sauveur!* Shall I mention it? Can I mention it without blushing? Brother, I'm as guilty as you are because I didn't instruct you well. Can I really say this? I have to swallow my shame as much as you do because I'm guilty of it. The day before yesterday, Brother, you drank too much, to the point that it was obvious when you came into the house. *O Sauveur!* Drinking too much wine to the point that it was obvious! Acting like a drunkard! I, a miserable sinner, am the one responsible for this disorder; and it wouldn't have happened except for the sins of this wretch. O Brother, both of us should be ashamed of this! After that, you fell asleep in the kitchen in front of our Brothers; what an example to the newcomers! What will they say of you? What will they say of me for having persons like that in the Mission? Is that how people live here? *Quoi!* They nurture and tolerate such vices? *O Sauveur!* What a scandal to the newcomers! What a scandal! O Messieurs, pray for us. O Brothers, have compassion on our Brother and pray that you can bear with us. He's our brother; for the love of God, have pity on his wretchedness. Ah, my poor Brother! Doubtless, that stems from something else; a person doesn't fall all of a sudden into those flagrant faults except as a punishment for other failings. O Brother, you've often humbled yourself for this, thank God, but you must have relapsed and been unfaithful to God. Ah! What shall we do now, Brother? You have faults, you have passions and, after all those humiliations, prayers, recommendations, and resolutions you've made about them, you're letting yourself give in to them! What shall we do now? What has happened to that spirit of humility? What has become of all those recommendations? What has become of them?

Where are all those protestations now? Where are they, Brother? Where are the resolutions you made to serve God faithfully? What has become of all that? O my poor Brother! And what will become of this act of humility that you're now making? What will become of this shame we're now drinking? O Brother, will you change because of that? We have to hope so, since God has given you the grace to humble yourself. Accept this shame willingly before everyone, and offer it to Him as your atonement. We're going to pray for you, and we hope God will give you the grace of doing better in the future, if you're willing to do so."

138. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 25, 1655

M. Vincent praised a priest and two seminarians for having reflected in detail on their faults during meditation. He asked M. Delespiney, Director of the Internal Seminary, to see that they always observe this practice "because," he said, "that's how meditation should be made and acting otherwise is not true meditation. Isn't what we've just heard about that great, holy King of France, Saint Louis,² admirable? The author of the meditation reports that he kept all his passions in check and under control in order to make them subject and obedient to reason! In addition, Saint Louis was the most noble King we've had in France, which he showed clearly by leaving his kingdom to go to win back the Holy Land, compelling the Comte de la Marche to come to his senses. This Count was unwilling to render to Saint Louis the obedience he owed him and, his heart filled with pride because of the help given by his brother-in-law the King of England,³ who was protecting him,

Conference 138. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 30v.

¹*Subheading:* Benefit of reflecting on one's faults in detail during meditation; example of Saint Louis; dangers threatening Poland.

²Louis IX (1214-70) was canonized in 1297.

³Henry III (1216-72).

Saint Louis took up arms against him and forced him to come to his senses, along with the King of England. He really put both of them in their place.

“What did that great saint and noble King not do in the war with the Albigensians?⁴ When the Comte de Toulouse revolted, as did Languedoc, Gascony, a large part of Guyenne, and Provence, at the time of a heresy which had been disseminated in a very short time throughout those provinces, Saint Louis sent preachers there. Saint Dominic was one of them, along with those theologians whom you know from history and who had such wonderful results. Next, he himself went there for an armed attack in order to bring all those revolted provinces to their senses. It’s admirable to see how he did this with such courage and nobility of heart. He really put the Count in his place, together with his allies and soon made him see reason and do his duty, despite all the large military units the latter had.

“Now, that shows us, Brothers, that humility is in no way contrary to magnanimity, and those who say the opposite are foolish and mistaken if they claim that, because a man is humble, he can’t be magnanimous; many people make that mistake, since we see that Saint Louis was extremely humble and very noble-minded. A short time ago I had the honor of being with a high-ranking Lord and was speaking with him about the laws of the State in the time of Saint Louis. ‘*Eh quoi, Monsieur!*’ he said, ‘do you think it was noble of Saint Louis to have left and abandoned his kingdom to go to a foreign land, where you know what happened?’ *Eh quoi, Monsieur!* I replied, did Saint Louis show his magnanimity only outside his kingdom? Didn’t he subdue the Albigensians? And wasn’t he courageous in bringing the Comte de la Marche, brother of the King of England, back to reason and to his duty, and the Comte de Toulouse as well? ‘*Monsieur,*’ he said to me, ‘as a matter of fact, you’re right.’

⁴Albigensianism, which had its roots in third century Manichaeism, taught that the devil is not only the creator of matter, but even a rival god; the Christian God is the creator of spirit-being only; Christ is not God but an angelic spirit whose “body” had only a corporeal appearance; and there is no hell, purgatory, or final resurrection. The Albigensians, like the Manichaeans, believed that suicide would be permissible and even laudatory, and thus they were considered a threat to the state. Louis IX used the Dominican preachers, a Crusade, and the Inquisition to combat them.

“Or sus! Blessed be God! In the Archives of the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris, where that good King used to go two or three times a week to serve the poor, as you see the Ladies of Charity doing today, care has been taken to record that this holy King was accustomed to asking to be shown those poor persons who had the worst and most foul-smelling diseases. There was one of them one day, whose terrible odor from his disease was so strong that he could barely stand himself. History tells us that Saint Louis took off his cloak and approached that pitiful man to help him, even though that poor patient begged and entreated him not to come near him because of the unbearable stench of his body, which he himself couldn’t endure. The men in the King’s retinue were unable to go any nearer and either held their nose or left that place. But the King replied to that poor man, ‘Cheer up, my friend. I hope Our Lord will change all these odors into such beautiful scents that it will be easy to serve you.’ Isn’t that beautiful, Messieurs? Tell the truth! Let’s ask God, Brothers, to give us a share in the spirit of Saint Louis, that great King, who loved the poor so much and was so mortified. Or sus! Blessed be God!

“Yesterday I heard that Poland was in very great danger because of all the enemies it has on its hands. The King of Sweden has attacked that kingdom on this side, the Palatine of Poznan has revolted and has joined the King of Sweden, and another Palatine Prince has done likewise. M. Lévêque, a layman who is the Chargé d’Affaires of Poland, and who came here yesterday, also told me this news; so you see the deplorable state to which this poor kingdom is reduced and what good reason we have to intercede with God to ask His Divine Majesty to be pleased to protect the King, the Queen, and their kingdom. Such a good King and such a good, devout Queen! Yet, God is testing them, and they’re at the point I just described: the Muscovites on one side, the Cossacks on the other; and all of them Greek [Orthodox], Lutherans, and schismatics. You see to what that poor kingdom will be reduced if God doesn’t intervene. I’ve been told that in some of the cities they took in the beginning they’ve forced even men and women religious to embrace their religion, to observe their ceremonies, and to be rebaptized. That’s why I ask the Company to pray for that poor kingdom, all the more so since it’s a question of the

glory of God and the Catholic religion, which would most likely be abolished, and to pray for the King, who is so good to us that he was on the verge of making another establishment of the Company near Warsaw. In truth, Messieurs, when I was told that news, I was so distressed by it that I don't know if I've ever been like that; and even as I'm speaking to you, I still find it very painful, etc.”

139. - FRANCIS WHITE, MISSIONER IN SCOTLAND

[1655]¹

“We’re going to thank God for having freed an innocent man and that someone who suffered all that for love of His Savior has been found among us. Despite the fear of death, this good priest still went back into the Scottish Highlands and worked there as he had previously done. Oh, what good reason do we not have to thank God for having given this Company the spirit of martyrdom, that light, I say, and the grace that made him see something great, luminous, brilliant, and divine in dying for the neighbor in imitation of Our Lord! We shall thank God for that and ask Him to give each one of us this same grace of suffering and giving our life for the salvation of souls.”

140. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

September 12, 1655

Speaking of the afflictions and wars in Poland, M. Vincent said that the body of the Company was suffering in some parts of its

Conference 139. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. XI, p. 211, excerpt.

¹In 1655 Francis White [François Le Blanc] was released from prison.

Conference 140. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 32.

¹*Subheading:* News of the missions in Poland and Barbary.

members, meaning the Missioners in Poland. He thought they had been ordered to leave Warsaw to avoid the wrath of the Swedish army, which had sacked Poznan, killing the Suffragan Bishop and several other priests. He added that God has His reasons for allowing things to happen in that way, and that, if He made known to us His reason for acting like that, we'd say that He does well and is right in doing it. "When the Divine Majesty grants us the grace of getting to heaven above, one of the first things God will show us will be the reasons why He acted the way He did on earth; for you see, God does nothing without some good purpose and only very justly; that's why we must be conformed to His Will in everything and adore His ever-admirable guidance, although these are often unknown to us and we'll never know them until we get to heaven.

"Here's another cause of suffering, although from a different source. M. Le Vacher² in Tunis has written me that the Dey, that is, the King in that country, sent for him to tell him he had been informed that he [M. Le Vacher] was working miracles to get the Christians who wanted to become Turks³ to change their minds, and for that reason he'd have to leave the city. M. Le Vacher obeyed and went off to Bizerte, accompanied by a guard and by his dragoman.⁴ When he arrived there, he found two ships of poor Christians. He encouraged them to go to confession, and for that purpose he asked the Commander to have them unchained, which was granted."

Then, M. Vincent exclaimed, saying, "Who knows, Messieurs, whether it wasn't God's plan to allow this slight misfortune to happen to good M. Le Vacher to give him the means of assisting and helping those poor Christians to put themselves in a good state?"

"Next," he said, "when the Consul M. Husson⁵ went to see the Dey to ask him to be good enough to recall M. Le Vacher, pointing

²Jean Le Vacher.

³Muslims.

⁴Interpreter and guide.

⁵Martin Husson, born in 1623, was a lawyer in the Paris Parlement and had been Intendant in the de Gondi household since 1650. Saint Vincent had great respect for him, as is evident from the Saint's letters, especially IV, 560 and 596. Husson accepted the offer he made him of the position of French Consul in Tunis and took up residence there in July 1653. While in Tunis he

out that he worked only with poor Christians and didn't interfere with the Turkish religion, etc., this was granted and he ordered the Governor of Bizerte not to let M. Le Vacher set sail to return to France, in the event that he wanted to do so, and that, without further ado, he should return to Tunis in one month so that it would seem as if nothing had happened; all the more so as the Dey saw clearly that he could be accused of triviality in having exiled a man for such a thing, and, if he went back to a Christian country, the Turks detained there might be mistreated.

"Those are the reasons given for recalling M. Le Vacher to Tunis. Now, let me tell you that, when that good man, M. Le Vacher, was in Bizerte, he wrote me that he awaited orders from us either to return to France or to go to Algiers. An easy-going, pleasure-loving heart might have been glad for this opportunity to return to France; yet we find him quite ready to go to Algiers, where there's even more work than in Tunis! That, Messieurs, is what true servants of God, animated by His Spirit, are made of.

"To tell the truth, if, on the one hand, God allows some to abandon their vocation,⁶ there's good reason for consolation, on the other hand, to see such fine members in the Company.

"What about his brother⁷ M. Le Vacher in Algiers? He's a man filled with ardor, who risks his life to the point that, if what he was doing had been known, even if he had a hundred lives he would have lost them. They would have done nothing short of burning him alive. Take, for example, what he did to make a religious who had become a Turk renounce that cursed faith. If that had been known, they would have done nothing less than burn him alive. That's what they do in that country. In a word, he's a man who works perpetu-

was an invaluable help and a faithful friend to Jean Le Vacher. Ignominiously expelled by the Dey in April 1657, he returned to France and became Intendant for the Duchesse d'Aiguillon. When he died in December 1695, he left a reputation as a learned, pious, virtuous man and a celebrated author.

⁶*In the margin:* "M. Vageot had left the Company eight or ten days earlier."

Philippe Vageot, born in Bellegarde (Ain), entered the Congregation of the Mission as a seminarian on May 3, 1645, at twenty-three years of age, and took his vows on October 12, 1647. In September 1648 he was ordained a priest and was sent to Saintes shortly after ordination. He was Superior there from 1651 to 1655, the year he left the Company.

⁷Philippe Le Vacher.

ally. I can tell you also that last Easter, when he saw that he had only one week left for helping the poor people and wouldn't be able to manage in such a short time unless he worked very hard, he shut himself in with them in their *bagne*⁸ and spent that week working day and night, with very little rest, risking his life in this way to assist his neighbor!

“Isn't that beautiful, Messieurs? What do you think of that? Don't we have grounds to bless God for giving such members to the Company as these servants of His? Oh, how earnestly I ask God to give the Company the spirit of suffering and to be glad to suffer for the love of Our Lord! Let's ask God for this, Messieurs. And you, dear Brothers, ask His Divine Majesty to give the Company this same spirit.”

141. - THE ECCLESIASTICAL STATE

[September 1655]¹

“Blessed are You, Lord, for the good things that have just been expressed and which You inspired those who spoke to say! But, my Savior, all that will be useless, if You don't put Your hand to it; Your grace has to actualize all that was said in order to give us that spirit without which we can do nothing. What do we, poor wretched men, know how to do? O Lord, give us the spirit of Your priesthood, which Your Apostles and the first priests who followed them had; give us the true spirit of this sacred character you bestowed on poor fishermen, artisans, and needy people of that time, to whom, by Your grace, you communicated this great, divine spirit. For we, too, are only weak people, Lord, poor workers and peasants; and what comparison is there between us, wretched men, and such a

⁸Prison in many Mediterranean port cities where slaves were housed.

Conference 141. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. II, sect. IV, p. 223, excerpt.

¹The passage concerning the invasion of Poland by the Swedish King implies the date of this conference.

holy, distinguished, heavenly ministry! O my dear confreres, how earnestly we must ask God for this and exert ourselves for this great need of the Church, which is heading for ruin in many places because of the bad life of priests. For they're the ones causing it to perish and destroying it; and it's only too true that the depravity of the ecclesiastical state is the principal cause of the ruin of God's Church. Recently I was at a meeting where there were seven Prelates who, reflecting on the disorders that are seen in the Church, were stating loudly that the clergy were the principal cause of this.

"So then it's priests. Yes, we're the cause of this desolation ravaging the Church and the deplorable diminution it has suffered in so many places, having been almost entirely destroyed in Asia and Africa, and even in a large part of Europe, as in Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, and other United Provinces,² and a large part of Germany. And how many heretics we're seeing in France! And look at Poland, too; already greatly tainted by heresy, it's now in danger of being completely lost to religion because of the invasion of the King of Sweden.

"Doesn't it seem, Messieurs, that God wants to transfer His Church to other countries? Yes, if we don't change, it's to be feared that God may take it completely from us, mainly in view of the fact that we're seeing those powerful enemies of the Church entering it by force. We should fear that God may have raised up that formidable King of Sweden, who, in less than four months has invaded a good part of that great kingdom, to punish us for our disorders. These are the same enemies God formerly used for a similar purpose; for it was the Goths, Visigoths, and Vandals, who came out of that area twelve hundred years ago, whom God used to afflict His Church. Those beginnings, the strangest that ever were, should put us on our guard. Such a vast kingdom invaded in almost no time, in the space of four months! *O Seigneur!* Who knows whether that fearsome conqueror will stop at that? Who knows? In a word, *ab*

²United Provinces of the Netherlands, comprised of Holland and several other Provinces, including modern day Belgium, and referred to as the Low Countries.

Aquilone pandetur omne malum;³ the troubles our ancestors endured came from there, and it's from that direction we have to fear.

“So, let's think about how to improve the ecclesiastical state, since bad priests are the cause of all those misfortunes and are the ones who draw them down on the Church. Those good Prelates recognized this from personal experience and acknowledged it before God; and we should say to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, we're the ones who have aroused Your anger; it's our sins that have drawn down these calamities; yes, it's seminarians and those who aspire to priesthood, subdeacons, deacons, and priests, we who are priests, who have caused this desolation in the Church. *Mais quoi!* What can we do now, Lord, if not to be distressed before You and to determine to change our lives! Yes, my Savior, we want to do all we can to make satisfaction for our past faults and to put the priestly state in better order. That's why we're meeting here and asking for Your grace.’

“Ah, Messieurs, what must we not do? It's to us that God has entrusted the tremendous grace of helping to reestablish the priestly state. God didn't turn for that either to theologians or to so many Communities and religious Orders full of learning and holiness but to this weak, poor, wretched Company, the last and most unworthy of all. What did God find in us for such a great work? Where are our fine exploits? Where are the brilliant, renowned deeds we've accomplished? Where is our great ability? None of all that; it's to poor, wretched imbeciles that God, by His pure Will, has turned to try once again to repair the breaches in the kingdom of His Son and the ecclesiastical state. O Messieurs, let's preserve carefully this grace God has given us in preference to so many holy, learned persons who would merit it more than we do; for, if we happen to render it useless by our negligence, God will take it from us in order to give it to others and to punish us for our infidelity.

“Alas, which of us will be responsible for such a great misfortune, and who will deprive the Church of such a great benefit? Will not I, wretched man, be the one? Let each of us scrutinize his conscience and say to himself, ‘Shall I be that unfortunate man?’ Alas,

³From the north, all evil will spread out. Cf. Jer 1:14. (NAB)

it takes only one wretched man like me to turn away, by his depravity, the favors of heaven for an entire house and cause God's curse to fall upon it. O Lord, You who see me so covered and filled with sins that weigh me down, do not deprive this Little Company of Your graces because of that; grant that it may continue to serve You in humility and fidelity and to cooperate in the plan You seem to have of making, through its ministry, one last attempt to contribute to reestablishing the honor of Your Church.

"But what are the means for doing that? What do we have to do for the success of the upcoming ordination? Given our inadequacies, we have to pray a great deal, offering for that intention during this time our Communions, mortifications, and all our meditations and prayers, and having in view in everything the edification of the ordinands. We must also render them every kind of respect and deference, not taking this for granted but serving them cordially and humbly. These are to be the weapons of Missioners; by this means everything will turn out well, and by humility, which causes us to desire shame for ourselves. For, take my word for it, my dear confreres, take my word for it, it's an infallible maxim of Jesus Christ, which I've often proclaimed to you on His behalf, that, as soon as a heart is empty of self, God fills it. God remains and acts in it; and it's the desire for shame that empties us of ourselves; that's humility, holy humility. Then it won't be ourselves acting but God acting in us, and all will go well.

"O you who are directly engaged in this work, you who should have the spirit of the priesthood and inspire it in those who don't have it, you to whom God has entrusted those souls to dispose them to receive this holy, sanctifying spirit, have nothing in view but the glory of God, have simplicity of heart in His regard and respect for those men. Know that this is how you'll be of service; everything else will be of little use to you. Only humility and a pure intention to please God have caused this work to succeed until now.

"I also recommend the ceremonies, and I ask the Company to avoid the faults that may be committed in them. To tell the truth, ceremonies are only the shadow, but the shadow of greater things, requiring us to observe them with all possible attention, religious si-

lence, great reserve, and gravity. How will those priests observe them if we ourselves don't observe them well? Sing without hurry and with moderation; chant the psalms devoutly. Alas! What will we reply to God when He asks us to give an account of these things, if they're done poorly?"

142. - CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD

October 15, 1655

There were three points: (1) the reasons we have to give ourselves to God in order to do His holy Will always and in all things; (2) in what that consists, and the acts; (3) the means of adopting this practice and of doing God's Will always and in all things.

After M. Vincent had announced the topic to the Company in this way, he said, "I'll begin to speak first, followed by a few other members of the Company. What reasons do we have, Messieurs, to give ourselves to God to adopt this holy practice of doing God's Will always and in all things? The first is drawn from the *Pater noster*, which we say every day and which Our Lord has taught us, *Fiat voluntas tua sicut in caelo et in terra*: may Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Just as the angels and the blessed in heaven do incessantly His holy and adorable Will, likewise Our Lord, desiring that we do the same here on earth, wanted us to do it in the same way and with the greatest perfection possible, etc.

"The second reason, Messieurs, is that Our Lord has given us the example in this, He who came here on earth for nothing else but to do the Will of God His Father by carrying out the work of our redemption; and He took His delight in doing the Will of God His Father, etc.

"In what does doing the Will of God consist? I'll tell you that we have to consider God's Will in regard to things commanded or for-

bidden, in those that are neither commanded nor forbidden but are indifferent and recommended, or in those that are necessary.

“With regard to God’s Will in things commanded, that’s indicated to us by His Law, by His Commandments and those of His Church, or is forbidden us by these same Commandments; for some precepts command us to do a certain thing, and others forbid us to do something else. In both we do God’s Will when we do what He ordains or don’t do what He forbids. Furthermore, God wills, and it’s His good pleasure, that we obey the Prelates of the Church, Kings, and Magistrates—when they either order or forbid us to do something—the laws of the kingdom in which we live, our mother, father, relatives, and Superiors. By so doing, we do the Will of God.

“As for indifferent actions that are neither commanded nor forbidden, either they’re pleasant or unpleasant, or have nothing pleasing or displeasing in them. If it’s something pleasing, like eating, drinking, and such necessary things, God’s good pleasure is that we do those things for love of Him and because He wills it thus, being detached from the pleasure nature experiences in this. If they’re not necessary, God’s good pleasure is that we deprive ourselves of them and mortify ourselves; but, if they’re unpleasant and mortifying to nature, that we embrace them. ‘Whoever wishes to come after me,’ says Our Lord, ‘let him renounce himself, take up his cross, and follow me.’¹ If there’s nothing either pleasant or unpleasant in them, such as to remain standing, to walk on this road or that, God’s Will is that we do it for love of Him. Saint Paul said, *Sive manducatis, sive bibitis, sive aliud quid facitis, omnia in gloriam Dei facite*:² whether you eat or drink or do something else, do it all for the greater glory of God. The result is, Messieurs, that we can do the Will of God at all times, if we’re willing. Oh, what a happiness, what a happiness, Messieurs, to do God’s Will always and in all things! Isn’t that doing what the Son of God came on earth to do, as we’ve already said? The Son of God came to evangelize the poor. And are not we, Messieurs, sent for the same purpose? Yes,

¹Cf. Mt 16:24. (NAB)

²Cf. 1 Cor 10:31. (NAB)

Missioners are sent to evangelize the poor. Oh, what a happiness to do on earth the same thing Our Lord did there, which is to teach poor persons the way to heaven!

“The means for that is to take great care to make our intention at the beginning of each act we do, saying to God, ‘My God, I’m going to do this for love of You; for love of You I’m going to stop doing this thing in order to do something else.’ For, you see, my dear confreres, the good intention we make at the beginning of our actions is, as it were, the form. For example, just as, for Baptism, to pour the water on the child—which is only the matter—isn’t sufficient to say that he’s baptized, but the words and the intention—the form—are also required; otherwise, the child would not be baptized. In the same way, the good intention we make at the beginning of our actions—which is to do them for love of God—raises them to the throne of His Divine Majesty, making them capable of meriting eternal life. Let’s ask God to grant us the grace of doing always and in all things His holy and adorable Will, and to adopt this practice. May God be pleased to grant us this grace!”

143. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

October 17, 1655

Speaking at the Repetition of Prayer of a Brother, who had gone on his knees and asked pardon of God and of the Company for the times he had given scandal to the same Company by failing to be present at Community exercises, such as morning meditation, exams, etc., under pretext of being pressured by work, M. Vincent said to him, “Brother, from now on, don’t fail to be present at Community exercises. You can rest assured, Brother, that you’ll lose nothing by this and that God will make up for the time you’ve used to serve Him by being here. Don’t you recall having heard

Conference 143. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 34.

¹*Subheading:* Conformity to the Will of God.

what we read about Saint Isidore the Farmer? He was a servant, who tilled the soil. In the morning, when he was in the fields to work his master's land, he used to leave his plow and go to hear Holy Mass when he heard the bell ring. Here's what Our Lord did for His servant: when his master yelled at him for leaving his horses and plow in the field like that and going off to hear Mass, then good Saint Isidore said to him, 'That's true, master, but please note that at the end of one year I've done as much work as my fellow plowmen. I have as much land to till as they do, I give as much attention to your land as they do to theirs; you don't have any more horses than they do and, despite that, I do just as much work as they do.' And, since this master was perplexed at how, in fact, he was able to do all that work so fast, God showed him how He saw that his servant's work got done while he was hearing Mass, and how that good work of hearing Mass daily pleased Him.

"Perfection doesn't consist in ecstasies but in doing the Will of God. What is perfection? I think it means something in which nothing is lacking. Now, what man is so perfect that he lacks nothing, since no man is perfect and the most just man sins seven times a day?² We can imagine two types of perfection: one more perfect and at the nth degree of perfection, and the other less perfect. For instance, when we see a man who's well built, handsome, and well proportioned, we say, 'Look at that fine body and handsome face, there's a man who lacks nothing, there's a perfect body.' On the other hand, we see others who fall short of all that—some more, some less—and are nowhere near the perfection of the first one in many ways. Now, I say the same of the perfection of human beings here below on earth. The Son of God made man had the first kind of perfection I've just mentioned; He lacked nothing; He was absolutely perfect in all things. We humans are represented by the second, imperfect in many things, since only the Son of God and the Most Holy Virgin His mother have attained this first degree of perfection I just mentioned.

²Cf. Prov 24:16. (NAB)

“The religious is said to be in a state of perfection—not that he’s perfect; for we have to differentiate between the state of perfection and being perfect, and, as I’ve just said, even though the religious may have done what Our Lord said, that is, sold all his goods and given them, if you like, to the poor,³ for all that he’s not perfect, even though he’s in the state of perfection.

“Now, who will be the most perfect of all human beings? It will be the one whose will is most in conformity with that of God, with the result that perfection consists in uniting our will so closely to that of God that, strictly speaking, His and ours are only one and the same will and non-will, and the more someone excels on this point, the more perfect he’ll be. For I ask you, please, Messieurs, what did Our Lord say to that man in the Gospel to whom He wanted to teach the way to attain perfection? ‘If you wish to come after me,’ He told him, ‘renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow me.’⁴

“Now, I ask you, Messieurs, who renounces himself more than the person who never does his own will but always that of God? And who mortifies himself more? And if, on the other hand, it’s said in Holy Scripture that the person who remains faithful to God is made one spirit with Him,⁵ who remains more faithful to God, I ask you, than the man who never does anything but the Will of the same God, and never his own, who wills and desires nothing but what God wills or doesn’t will? I ask you, my dear confreres, if you know anyone who is more faithful to God and, consequently, more united to God than that person.

“If that’s how it is, that no one ever renounces himself and follows Our Lord more perfectly than the man whose will is totally conformed to God’s Will, and who clings more faithfully to the same God than the one who wills only what He wills or doesn’t will, we must, of necessity, conclude that no man is so perfectly united to God and becomes one spirit with Him than the person who does what I just said. O Messieurs! O Brothers! If we were to ponder that

³Cf. Mt 19:21. (NAB)

⁴Cf. Mt 16:24. (NAB)

⁵Cf. 1 Cor 6:17. (NAB)

well, what a means of acquiring a great treasury of grace we'd see in this life!

“The practice of the presence of God is very good, but I think that adopting the practice of doing God's Will in all our actions is even better; for the latter embraces the former. Besides, the man who keeps himself in the presence of God can sometimes, for all that, not be doing the Will of God. And please tell me, aren't we in the presence of God when we do the Will of God, being careful to make our intention for that at the beginning of each action and renewing it when it's in progress? Who keeps himself more in the presence of God than the person who, from morning to night, does all that he does to please Him and for love of Him? Isn't always doing His holy Will a constant practice of the presence of God? When we go to meditation, that's doing God's Will and obeying the Rule ordaining it. When we go to the examens, that's doing God's Will, even for dinner and supper and going to bed at the time the Rule stipulates—all that is doing the Will of God.

“Yes, Brothers, you can be as pleasing to God by working in your duty, be it in the kitchen or the pantry, as we priests are by preaching and catechizing; you're doing what Our Lord did for thirty years, and we're doing what He did for only three years. May God be pleased to grant us the grace of adopting this holy practice!”

143a. - MARTYRDOM OF PEDRO BORGUÑY¹ IN ALGIERS

[1654 or 1655]

“I can’t refrain from telling you the sentiments God has given me about the young man I just mentioned, who was killed in the city of Algiers. His name was Pierre Bourgoïn,² born on the island of Majorca, and he was only twenty-one or twenty-two years old. The master of whom he was the slave was planning to sell him to be sent to the galleys of Constantinople, from which he would never have been able to leave. Fearing this, he went to see the Pasha to ask him to have mercy on him and not permit that he be sent to those galleys. The Pasha promised to do so, provided he put on the turban.³ To force him to this apostasy, he used every type of persecution he could imagine; in the end, adding threats to promises, he intimidated him in such a way that he became a renegade.

“Nevertheless, that poor boy always kept in his heart the sentiments of esteem and love he had for his religion; he committed that fault only for fear of falling into that cruel slavery and with the desire of facilitating the recovery of his freedom. He even declared to a few Christian slaves who reproached him for his crime that, if he was a Turk exteriorly, in his soul he was a Christian.

“Gradually, reflecting on the serious sin he had committed in renouncing his religion exteriorly, he was moved to true repentance for it. Seeing that he could expiate his cowardice only by his death,

Conference 143a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. VII, §5, p. 111ff., excerpt, formerly Conf. 163. This conference had to have been given in 1654 or 1655. Coste noticed, after the fact, that it was in the wrong place and should have been included earlier. For this reason the editors have repositioned it here.

¹On August 30, 1654, Philippe Le Vacher wrote an account of this martyrdom to Propaganda Fide. Despite the risk involved, Le Vacher was able to remove the martyr’s body. In 1657 he brought the remains to Paris, together with a painting depicting the intrepid young man in the midst of flames. In 1747, at the request of the Missioners in Spain, Saint-Lazare gave his relics to a house in Palma, on the island of Majorca, where Pedro Borguñy was born. His biography, which included Le Vacher’s account, was written by Fernando Nualart, C.M., Postulator of his Cause (cf. *Vida y Martirio del Siervo de Dios Pedro Borguñy* [Majorca, 1820], pp. 117-46). In a letter to Charles Ozenne in Warsaw, written on March 19, 1655 (cf. V, 339), Saint Vincent refers to a letter he had recently received from Philippe Le Vacher concerning the martyrdom.

²Pedro Borguñy.

³Become a Muslim.

he made up his mind to this rather than to live any longer in that state of infidelity. After revealing his intention to some of the men, to put it into practice he began to speak openly in favor of the Christian religion and in contempt of Islam and said everything a lively faith could suggest to him on this topic, even in the presence of some Turks and, above all, in the presence of the Christians. He feared, however, the cruelty of those barbarians and, envisaging the rigors of the sufferings they would make him undergo, he trembled with fright of them. ‘Still,’ he said, ‘I hope Our Lord will help me; He died for me; it’s only right that I should die for Him.’

“Moved at last by remorse of conscience and the desire to make reparation for the insult he had given Jesus Christ, in his generous determination he went to find the Pasha, and once he was in his presence said, ‘You seduced me by making me give up my religion, which is the good and true one, and making me join yours, which is false. Now, I declare to you that I am a Christian; and to show you that I willingly abjure your faith and the religion of the Turks, I reject and despise the turban you gave me.’ And while saying these words, he threw that turban on the ground and stamped on it, adding, ‘I know you’ll have me killed, but that doesn’t matter to me, for I’m ready to suffer all sorts of torments for Jesus Christ my Savior.’

“Angered by this boldness, the Pasha immediately condemned him to be burned alive. He was then stripped and left only in his underpants. They put a chain around his neck and made him carry a heavy stake to which he would be attached and burned alive. Leaving the Pasha’s residence in this condition to be brought to the place of torture, when he saw himself surrounded by Turks, renegades, and even Christians, he said aloud these beautiful words, ‘Long live Jesus Christ, and may the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman faith triumph forever! There is no other in which one can be saved!’ Having said that, off he went to undergo the fire and receive death for Jesus Christ.

“Now, the greatest sentiment I experience from such a beautiful act is that this brave young man had said to his companions, ‘Even though I fear death, nevertheless I feel something here (putting his hand on his forehead), telling me that God will grant me the grace to

endure the torture they're preparing for me. Our Lord himself feared death; yet He willingly suffered greater pains than those they will make me suffer; I'm hoping in His strength and goodness.' Then he was tied to a stake, and the fire was lit around him, which soon made him render his soul, pure as gold tried in the furnace, into the hands of God. M. Le Vacher, who had followed him all along, was present at his martyrdom; although he was a little far off, he lifted from him the excommunication he had incurred and gave him absolution at the signal he had agreed upon with him, while he was suffering with such constancy.

"That, Messieurs, is what a Christian is made of, and that's the courage we must have in order to suffer and to die, when necessary, for Jesus Christ. Let's ask Him for this grace and beg that holy young man to request it for us, he who was such a worthy student of such a courageous Master, and who, in the space of three hours, became His true disciple and perfect imitator by dying for Him.

"Courage, my dear confreres! Let's hope that Our Lord will strengthen us in the crosses that come to us, no matter how great they may be, if He sees that we love them and have confidence in Him. If illness presents itself, and if persecution, exterior and interior trials, temptation, and even death itself present themselves to us, let's say to them, 'Welcome, celestial favors, graces from God, holy trials coming from a paternal and all-loving hand for my benefit; I receive you with a heart filled with respect, submission, and confidence toward the one who sends you; I abandon myself to you in order to give myself to Him.' So then, let's enter into these sentiments, my dear confreres; above all, like this new martyr, let's have the greatest confidence in the assistance of Our Lord, to whom we will please recommend those good Missioners in Algiers and Tunis."

144. - PRAISE FOR THE ZEAL OF JEAN LE VACHER

[1655 or 1656]

“I’ve received news of the Missioners in Barbary, whom I recommend to the prayers of the Company: some of the news is consoling and some is distressing; what we hear from Tunis is consoling, but what comes from Algiers is distressing.

“Our M. Le Vacher had been expelled by the Dey because he said he was preventing sailcloth from being brought to Tunis, and for that reason he was banished. As a matter of fact, he did try to see that Marseilles not send any more canvas, etc., and he made the Christian merchants stop this because the Pope was excommunicating anyone who transported this sailcloth, weapons, or anything else that could be used against the Christians. In the end, however, when the Consul¹ pointed out to him that the King of France would disapprove of the fact that his envoy had been expelled, he recalled him. He returned there, and those poor slaves came to meet him, some praising God, some throwing themselves on him to embrace him, some saying as one did, ‘I fasted for this intention;’ another, ‘I heard so many Masses;’ and someone else, ‘I said so many prayers.’ Each of them had done something so that he might be recalled. All the poor men could do was express their joy to him. He’s their savior, their deliverer; and if there are angels whom God sends to purgatory to console souls, in like manner, etc., whoever says Missioner, Messieurs, says savior; we’re called to save souls; that’s why we’re here. Are we carrying out this duty? Are we saving souls?

“Let’s go back to Tunis, where our M. Le Vacher serves as a savior. He has proclaimed the Jubilee; he doesn’t even have time to write to me; someone else—the Consul—has written to me. Those poor captives are very eager for this Jubilee, which they have there but which we don’t yet have. What a great reason for consolation and for thanking God!”

Conference 144. - Life of Jean Le Vacher, MS, p. 16, excerpt. This conference was given after May 14, 1655, the day on which the Jubilee was promulgated in Rome, and before March 19, 1656, the day on which Saint Vincent read the Bull of the Jubilee at Saint-Lazare.

¹Martin Husson.

145. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

February 20, 1656

“At the end of Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent said that the faculty of the Sorbonne had issued its decree, whereby it censured the opinions of Jansenius on those points brought before the Parlement by M. Arnauld² and his adherents, and that the said society of the Sorbonne had declared M. Arnauld unworthy of the title of theologian, of which he will remain deprived, along with all the honors and privileges due him in this capacity, for failing to come to sign and give his submission to the said censure, and that he, and all his supporters who sided with him, will be considered heretics until they had come to sign the said censure. He also said that the decree states that, from now on, no one who has not signed the censure will be accepted to present himself for his Bachelor’s degree, and no Theologian will be admitted to teach theology unless he had first signed the censure.³

After M. Vincent had reported this to the Company, he asked it to thank God for all that, especially for having granted the same Company of the Mission the grace of not finding itself caught up in the errors of those people. “O Messieurs, what a protection of God on the Little Company! What a special grace to see it maintaining the pure doctrine of the Church. In a word, what a grace His Divine Majesty has granted it to be exonerated of anything contrary to the

Conference 145. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 35v.

¹*Subheading:* Ruling of the Sorbonne against Arnauld and his followers; gratitude to God for the grace of preserving the Company from Jansenism.

²Antoine Arnauld, born in Paris on February 6, 1612, was ordained a priest in 1641. On the death of Saint-Cyran, he became the leader of the Jansenist party, whose apostle and theologian he had already been. His first controversial work, *De la fréquente communion, où les sentiments des Pères et des Conciles touchant l’usage des sacrements de Pénitence et d’Eucharistie sont fidèlement exposez*, gave him a great deal of notoriety. He later wrote *Grammaire générale, La Logique ou l’Art de penser* and such a large number of other treatises that, combined with his letters, they form a collection of forty-five volumes. Arnauld died in exile in Brussels on August 8, 1694. His brothers and sisters were all ardent Jansenists; some of them—Arnauld d’Andilly; Henri Arnauld, Bishop of Angers; Catherine, mother of Le Maistre de Sacy; Mère Marie-Angélique; and Mère Agnès—played important roles in the party. (Cf. Pierre Varin, *La Vérité sur les Arnauld* [2 vols., Paris: Poussielgue, 1847].)

³The decree of censure was issued on January 31, 1656.

pure truth and doctrine of Our Lord and the saints! How much should we, the Company in general, and each one of us in particular, thank God for not allowing us to have fallen into the misfortune of so many people, even some of the most able persons of this period, who have yielded unfortunately to those harmful new opinions! As for me, I've always regarded and considered as saints all those I've seen maintaining themselves in the truth of doctrine and resisting those deplorable opinions, and I regard and consider them as such."

146. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

February 27, 1656

M. Vincent strongly recommended that the Company ask God for the virtues proper to the same Company, but especially for humility. "For," he said, "if a person has humility, what can he not do? He's content if he, as an individual, is despised, and even the Company in general. For I ask you, don't you see, for example, that the person who accepts being despised as an individual but can't stand to see the Company as a whole despised in any way, but rather that it be highly praised and esteemed, don't you see, I repeat, that such a person finds himself in the same Company and takes back what he had given? So you see then, brothers, that a Missioner must not only be willing to accept humiliations personally, but must also accept those that God allows to happen to the Company in general, of which he's a member.

"Is there anyone better suited or more in conformity with God's plan than persons who have emptied themselves of self and have no other aim than to use their lives for the glory of His Divine Majesty and the salvation of the neighbor?"²

Conference 146. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 36.

¹*Subheading:* Humility.

²*In the margin:* "I think he is saying this about the foreign missions and the ordinands."

“Yesterday someone came here to speak with me and to tell me that Maréchal de la Meilleraye³ was coming to an agreement with the members of the Assembly of the Indies, who are in this city, and that they were arranging to send a ship there every year. In addition, they had planned to establish themselves in several different places on the island of Madagascar, and Maréchal de la Meilleraye had informed them that they had to have the assurance from me that priests and Brothers would be sent there. Consequently, he added. . . .⁴ We also need men for Scotland and the Hebrides. We’ve been asked for them in some other place in the Indies as well, but we can’t take on all that at the same time, since we don’t have enough men; for now, we’ll simply try to give some for Madagascar, while waiting until God is pleased to send us workers.

“That, my dear confreres, is a beautiful field of action, as you can see; that’s why we ask God to be pleased to send good subjects to the Company.”

147. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

March 12, 1656

After a cleric who was a seminarian² made Repetition of Prayer, he knelt down to ask pardon of God and penance for a fault. “Brother,” M. Vincent said to him, “you haven’t accused yourself

³Charles de la Porte, Duc de la Meilleraye, born in 1602, owed his rapid advancement as much to the protection of Cardinal Richelieu as to his personal valor. He was appointed Grand Master of Artillery in 1634, Maréchal of France in 1637, Superintendent of Finance in 1648, and Duke and Peer in 1663. It was he who gave Saint Vincent the idea of sending Missioners to Madagascar. He died in Paris on February 8, 1664.

⁴The sentence is unfinished in this place in the manuscript, where the copyist left a line and a half blank.

Conference 147. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 36v.

¹ *Subheading:* Disobedience.

²Philippe-Ignace Boucher, born in Arras (Pas-de-Calais) on January 29, 1631, entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 20, 1654, took his vows on January 1, 1657, in the presence of M. Berthe, and left in 1660, shortly after ordination. In a letter to Guillaume Delville (cf. VI, 80), dated August 28, 1656, the saint mentions that he was still in the Internal Seminary.

of a much greater fault you committed this week. You asked permission of your Director, M. Delespiney, to go to hear the conference being given to the ordinands, but you were refused because while you're in the seminary it's not customary to go to hear the exhortations given at the ordination retreats; nevertheless, you still went. That's the fault you should accuse yourself of, Brother: formal disobedience to your Director, and disobedience committed by someone who has been in the seminary for twenty-one or twenty-two months! Alas, my poor Brother! If you do that while you're still in the cradle, what's to be expected of you, Brother, when you've out of it? On what grounds do you think the Company should accept you at the end of two years, since you fail in what is most specific and necessary for someone who wants to live in a Community, namely, obedience and submission. What are we going to do with you? I ask you, what good will you be, except to cause trouble to Superiors? Alas! What have you done since you've been in the seminary? How have you used your time, since, in the twenty-one or twenty-two months you've been here, you haven't been able to overcome yourself in order to obey?

"There's a certain person in the Company³ who wants to do only what he pleases and to follow his own whim: he goes to meditation when he feels like it; he goes here, there, and everywhere; he noses around; he goes into other men's rooms, pokes around, and goes through their papers, to the point that, recently he was even so ill-advised as to go into the room of a Councillor who was making his retreat here, rummaging through his papers in his room. What's that, Messieurs? Isn't that acting like a scatterbrain?

"There's another one of that ilk in the Company, who wants to do only what he likes. If he doesn't feel like going to give a mission, he's unwilling to go. In a word, it's pitiful to see men like that. And that, Brother, is the path you're taking, which is to be a scandal to the whole Company. What can be done with people like that, if not to ask God to touch their hearts and make them see the disorderly life they're living. For God himself has to do something, since ad-

³*In the margin: "a priest."*

monitions are useless in this matter. Now, Brother, to make reparation for this fault, and so that we can see whether or not to accept you, you will spend an additional six months in the seminary beyond your two years, that is, instead of two years, you'll stay there two and a half years. Go, Brother, work hard at mortifying yourself, and strive to give the Company reason to admit you at the end of that time."⁴

It should be noted here that, while M. Vincent was speaking, he refused to allow anyone whomsoever, not even a priest of the Company, to leave the choir of the church until he had finished that admonition, despite the fact that several people, priests as well as Brothers, had asked him for permission so they could go where their duties or work with the ordinands were calling them. As far as I've observed, I don't think he had been so strict about that for a long time; perhaps he did so on that occasion because there was question of an act of disobedience and things that could give scandal.

A few days previously, he told the Company that as many passions and evil, disorderly inclinations men have, that many demons tyrannize them.

148. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

March 16, 1656

After one of the coadjutor Brothers who works in the kitchen had made Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent began to speak, saying among other things that the meditation we had just made on the miserable rich man² gave him the opportunity to tell the Company that he had learned that, for some time now, a disorder had been creep-

⁴*In the margin:* "Note: This confrere [Boucher] left the Company soon after being promoted to Holy Orders, that is, in 1660."

Conference 148. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 37v.

¹*Subheading:* Concerning meals.

²Cf. Lk 16:19-31. (NAB)

ing in, and it was very important to correct it because of the consequences and danger it entailed. “Whenever someone comes back from the country, he’s taken to the infirmary or to a bedroom, and dinner or supper is brought to him. Some men had even been treated like this for two or three days in a row, which was an abuse and could cause a lot of harm because people talk and laugh there and encourage one another to have a drink. One man will say, ‘Drink to my health,’ and the other does it. Too much wine is brought in, and this can cause a great deal of harm. They chat and talk about silly things there. In a word, this is shameful. Now, I ask the Officers to see that this doesn’t happen again and that those who come in from the country eat supper in the refectory, where they can be given something extra. If they’ve come on foot from a great distance, are very tired and worn out, and need a change of linen in order to get warm, fine, they can go to rest and take their meal, either dinner or supper, in the infirmary or in some room set aside for that. Apart from that, however, I ask each and every member of the Company to go to the refectory, where they’ll be given what they need.”

Next, M. Vincent said that he also feared that some men in the Company were too eager to desire to have everything they wanted and to lack nothing: to be well clothed and fed, to have good bread and wine, and all the rest—a very dangerous state of mind. “For, tell me, Messieurs,” he said, “what reason does the Gospel give for the loss of that miserable rich man, other than he was well clothed, had good meals, and gave no alms to poor persons? That’s the reason the Gospel gives for his damnation. Poor Lazarus went to his door asking for alms and he gave him nothing, thinking only of living the good life and dressing luxuriously. That was the state of that poor wretched man. And do we, my dear confreres, who have to work in the rural areas for the salvation of the poor country people, whom we must look upon and consider our lords and masters, and to whose service the Company is called, do we still want nothing to be lacking to us and to live in clover? If we do, what will we answer to God? What excuse will we give Him?”

“I’m well aware that some among us don’t take enough care to water their wine well, but they must pay attention to this. Recently,

certain persons were discussing Communities and said that the most common vice of Communities is that of greed and softness. Alas, wretched man that I am, I who lack nothing, what an account I have to render to God!

“M. de Saint-Martin,³ who is very good to my poor relations, wrote me recently that my relatives are living on alms; the lord of my parish told me the same thing; and my Bishop—the Bishop of Dax—who was here yesterday, also said to me, ‘M. Vincent, your poor relatives are very bad off; if you don’t take pity on them, they’ll really have a hard time subsisting. Some of them died during the war,⁴ but there are still a few left, and they’re living on alms.’ Nevertheless, said M. Vincent, what can be done about that? I can’t give them what belongs to this house, for it doesn’t belong to me; besides, if I ask the Company to agree to giving them something to help them out, what an example I’ll be giving it! ‘*Quoi!*’ they’ll say, ‘M. Vincent did that, why can’t we do it as well? He assisted his relatives with the goods of the house.’ That’s what they’d say, and with good reason; that’s the scandal that would ensue from it. Added to that, most members of the Company have poor relatives and would have good reason to ask that they be helped as well. That, my dear confreres, is the situation of my poor relatives: living on alms, living on alms! And if God had not granted me the grace of being a priest and of being here, I’d be in the same state.

“Now, Messieurs, all that gives me the opportunity to tell the Company and to recommend what I’ve already said and recommended to you before: that no one, regardless of who he is, may invite anyone to dinner here, either relatives or friends; I repeat: no one, regardless of who he is. Furthermore, I forbid anyone to go to

³Canon de Saint-Martin, secretary of the Bishop of Dax (1640) and Officialis (Ecclesiastical Judge) of the diocese (1644). It was he who, on the urging of Bro. Ducournau, sent M. Watebled the original of the famous “Barbary Captivity” letter from Saint Vincent to M. de Comet (cf. I, 1). Abelly composed the first chapter of Saint Vincent’s biography with the help of the Canon’s recollections. He died in 1672.

⁴The civil wars of the Fronde (1648-52), an upheaval against Mazarin during the minority of Louis XIV. Brought on by the unpopularity of the Cardinal and his financial demands, and by the desire of the nobility to dominate the monarchy, the revolt was finally checked, and the monarchy emerged from this period greatly strengthened.

the Superior to ask permission for that, either to M. Alméras,⁵ or to M. Admirault,⁶ or to me, and should it happen that a member of the Company goes to ask their permission in this matter, I ask them to give them a penance for it and to forbid them to go to the refectory themselves to eat their meals there.

“And don’t be surprised, Messieurs (addressing the Company), if I forbid this; I’m doing it because the matter merits it and because things would go much further than you think.

“If we put up with that, our refectory would become a tavern where everyone would be welcome. I’ve never seen that the Jesuits invite all sorts of people, relatives, and friends to eat with them; and if it’s sometimes done with regard to a particular person, it must be for a special reason, the person must be very important, and the Rector himself requests it. At the Sorbonne, I’ve never seen anyone eat there, unless it was some Theologian or Bachelor. If, then, those important Companies that are so well known and take precedence over us, have deemed it appropriate to act like that, why shouldn’t we, who follow them, do likewise?”

And speaking to the Brothers, he said, “In saying this I’m not saying, Brothers, that you shouldn’t season food as best you can; on the contrary, you should, considering that the bread, wine, meat, and other things you prepare and season are to feed and nourish God’s servants; and you should look upon and consider them as such.”

At this point, when a priest of the Company whispered something in M. Vincent’s ear, suggesting that he say something about the food for the boarders⁷ in this house (or so it seemed), M. Vincent spoke in these terms: “With regard to the boarders, Brothers, I’ve heard that sometimes they’re given very unappetizing and poorly-prepared portions, even meat or wine left over from the evening before. Now that’s wrong, Brothers; they’re persons whose relatives are paying

⁵René Alméras, Assistant at Saint-Lazare.

⁶Charles Admirault, sub-Assistant at Saint-Lazare.

⁷Encompassed in the term “boarders” were those in a house of correction, especially libertines, spendthrifts, and the mentally ill about whom the Saint is speaking here. In 1659 there were between fifty and sixty of these boarders, who were dear to the Saint’s heart (cf. Conf. 13 above).

good money for room and board; isn't it only just that they be given something good and properly prepared? In the name of God, Brothers, don't do that any longer, but give them what you give us, what you give the priests. For you see, Brothers, you're doing an injustice to those poor people. Some of them are pitiful, simple-minded persons, who are enclosed and can't see you to complain of the injustice you do them. Yes, I call that an injustice. If you were to do that to someone in the Company—me or someone else—alas, we could ask that you do what's right in our regard and treat us like the others; but those poor people, who aren't in a position to be able to ask this of you, and, what's more, can't see you, can't do that; it's a serious fault indeed! I often see their relatives, who ask me how they're being treated. I tell them that they're treated the same as we are. Yet we see that this isn't the case, but rather that you're doing the contrary! You see, Brothers, that's material for confession, and I ask the confessors to attend to this, and the Officers to see that those good people are given the same as is given to the priests.

“I say, furthermore, that it's also an injustice against those who are paying a higher fee for room and board not to give them something more than those who pay less. So, please pay attention to all that, Brothers. Frankly, I prefer that you take something from me to give to them than to fail in what I've just recommended to you. And because, with regard to the relatives I just mentioned, I myself have given the Company reason for scandal by allowing a poor relation of mine to come here for meals during a certain period, I feel bound to ask pardon of the Company for this.”

Having said that, M. Vincent knelt down before the Company for this purpose and asked its pardon.

149. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

March 19, 1656

At the conclusion of morning meditation, M. Vincent had someone read in church the Bull of the Jubilee sent by our Holy Father Pope Alexander VII, together with the pastoral letter of Bishop du Saussay,² Bishop-elect of Toul, Officialis, and Vicar-General of His Eminence Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris. At the end of the pastoral letter were the names of the churches to be visited in this city and in the suburbs of Paris in order to gain the Jubilee.

Addressing the Company, M. Vincent then said, "And because some members of the Company may find fault with or think it strange to see that, among the many churches in which there will be stations, Saint-Lazare isn't named, I thought I should tell you, Messieurs, so that you don't find it strange, that the Officialis kindly offered to include us, but, after conferring with some of the senior members of the Company, we felt that, since the Company is not supposed to preach or hear confessions in cities where there's an archbishopric, bishopric, or presidial court,³ except during missions and with the ordinands and those making retreats, and that the Company is entirely for the poor people of the country, we felt it was better to give our excuses to the Officialis. For this purpose M. Alméras went to see him, on behalf of the Company, to thank him for the favor he showed us and to explain the Company's reasons for not accepting the station in our church. The reasons are those I just gave you, and he accepted them.

Conference 149. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 39v.

¹*Subheading:* The Jubilee.

²André du Saussay, Bishop of Toul. Born in Paris around 1589, he was a Doctor in both Civil and Canon Law, a talented controversialist, renowned orator, prolific writer, and the Pastor of Saint-Leu and Saint-Gilles (1624-56). He found favor with the King, who made him his counselor and preacher. He became Ecclesiastical Judge (Officialis) and Vicar-General of Paris (1643-55). Proposed by the Queen Regent for the office of Bishop in 1649, he was not approved by the Pope until 1656. The Bishop governed his diocese wisely and died on September 9, 1675, after meriting the praise engraved on his tomb: *vir clero et populo amabilis* [a man beloved by the clergy and the people]. (Cf. Eugène Martin, *Histoire des diocèses de Toul, de Nancy et de Saint-Dié* [3 vols., Nancy: A. Crépin-Leblond, 1900-03].)

³Royal courts established in the sixteenth century to relieve the pressure of appeals to the Parlements. In certain cases they also served as courts of first instance.

That's why we have no station here, Messieurs. We thank God for the grace He's giving to all the faithful by means of the Jubilee and will try to dispose ourselves well to gain it."

**150. - PERSECUTION OF JEAN LE VACHER
BY THE DEY OF TUNIS**

[May 7, 1656]¹

"Previously² I told you how the King of Tunis had wanted the Consul³ to have some cotton sailcloth (a kind of very coarse canvas used for making ships' sails) sent to him from France. The Consul apologized for failing to do this because not only do the laws of the kingdom not allow it but, by Bulls of the Holy Apostolic See, it's expressly forbidden, under pain of excommunication, to take to the Turks anything that may serve them to wage war against the Christians. When the Dey saw that he was being dismissed in this way, he went to a merchant from Marseilles who traded in Barbary, who agreed to get him some. This was in spite of the remonstrances of the Consul to deter him from doing this, who pointed out to him what an insult that would be to God and to the Christians, the wrong he'd be doing to himself, and the punishment he could receive if the King of France was informed of this wicked trafficking. Since this didn't deter the merchant from carrying out his plan, the Consul drew up his report and sent it here. The King had orders given to his officers in the ports of Provence and Languedoc to watch carefully that no ships there be loaded with contraband merchandise for Barbary. Doubtless this must have come to the knowledge of the Dey and made him even more incensed against the French Consul and the Missioners.

Conference 150. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. VII, §4, p. 109, excerpt.

¹Based on information available to him, Coste assigned this date, which, that year, was the fourth Sunday after Easter.

²Cf. Conf. 144.

³Martin Husson.

“As a matter of fact, shortly after that, he humiliated them, that is, provoked a groundless quarrel, and, sending for M. Le Vacher, said to him, ‘I want you to pay me 275 piastres that the Chevalier de la Ferrière owes me, for you belong to a religion that shares property as well as bad things, and for that reason I intend to get it from you.’ To this M. Le Vacher replied that Christians weren’t obliged to pay one another’s debts, that he didn’t have to do it, and couldn’t pay those of a Knight of Malta and a ship’s captain, as is M. de la Ferrière. In addition, he scarcely had enough to live on and was a marabout of the Christians (that is, a priest, in their way of speaking), who had come to Tunis for the express purpose of helping the poor slaves. ‘Say whatever you like,’ replied the Dey, ‘I want to be paid.’ And, using some acts of violence, he forced him to pay that amount.

“But that’s only the beginning; for, if God doesn’t change the disposition of that Dey, they’re on the verge of suffering other, far worse oppression. Well, they can say now that they’re starting to be more truly Christians, since they’re beginning to suffer by serving Jesus Christ, like Saint Ignatius the Martyr said when they were leading him to martyrdom. And we, Brothers, will become disciples of Jesus Christ when He grants us the grace of undergoing some persecution or harm for His name. ‘The world will rejoice,’ says today’s Gospel,⁴ yes, worldly people will seek their pleasure and avoid anything contrary to their nature. And God grant that I, wretched man, may not do the same and be one of those who seek sweetness and consolation in serving Jesus Christ, instead of loving tribulations and crosses! For, if that’s the case, I’m not truly Christian; but, to become so, God reserves for me the opportunity of suffering and will send it to me whenever He pleases. That’s the disposition in which we must all place ourselves, if we want to be true servants of Jesus Christ.”

⁴Cf. Jn 16:20. (NAB) In the post-Vatican II era this Gospel is assigned to the Mass for Thursday of the sixth week after Easter, if the Ascension is not celebrated on that Thursday.

151. - ADMONITIONS

June 9, 1656

The conference had two points: (1) reasons the Company had to accept willingly and to make good use of the admonitions given both in general and in particular; (2) the means for accepting well and making good use of those admonitions. At the end of the conference, M. Vincent said, among other things, that, in the Company of the Mission, this practice is a treasure for the same Company, and it must do its utmost to preserve it carefully and ask God for the grace of not taking it from it. He added that God wills that brother should admonish brother when he fails, so that he may correct himself, and that He has commanded each of us to take care of his neighbor. “Alas, my dear confreres! Please tell me, can anyone rightly find fault with being told that he has a spot on his face or that his clothing is stained? No, doubtless he’d be glad to know it. Why, then, should we find fault with being admonished of our faults? Certainly not; just the opposite, we should be glad of it and even ask our brothers to do us this charity.

“ ‘Yes,’ someone will say, ‘but a certain person says that I committed such and such a fault and yet that’s not the case; or he added something that’s not the way things happened.’ My reply to that is that it is or it isn’t; I mean that it’s true or it’s not. If it’s true, we have no reason to find fault with being admonished for it; on the contrary, we should humble and correct ourselves. If it’s not true, *eh bien*, it’s an opportunity Divine Providence presents to us to suffer and to practice an act of heroic virtue. If the person exaggerates a little too much and says something that didn’t happen in the way that was said in the admonition, we still have to endure it patiently. Tell me, brothers, how did the Son of God, who was innocence personified, put up with the admonitions and false accusations brought against him? You know how, I don’t have to tell you. Why, then,

would we be so weak and wretched as not to want to put up with the advice given to us!

“There’s someone in the Company¹ who was accused of having robbed his companion and was denounced for this in the house, although that wasn’t the case. Nevertheless, he was unwilling to justify himself and, seeing that he was being falsely accused, he thought to himself, ‘Are you going to justify yourself? You’re being accused of something, but it’s not true. Oh no,’ he said, raising his heart to God, ‘I have to bear that patiently.’ And that’s what he did. What happened next? Here’s what happened, Messieurs. Six months later,² when the thief was a hundred leagues from here, he acknowledged his fault and wrote to ask forgiveness for it. You see, God sometimes wants to test people, and that’s why He allows similar things to happen.

“But it may even happen that a Superior, for example, reproves a person for something that’s not entirely true. Maybe the Superior who gives the admonition is also well aware of this, but wants to test his subject to see if he’ll be suitable for a certain duty he has in mind for him. The Superior has the right to do that. First of all, we’re not our own masters and can’t help those first impulses that arise, as when certain persons are reproved for something, you see their expression change at the same time. What’s that, Messieurs? They’re the first natural reactions that occur and of which they’re not the master. And even if they were another Saint Paul, they couldn’t help that because those are the results of nature that’s full of self-love, and there’s no sin in them. But, once that has passed, if the man turns in on himself, and doesn’t repress those feelings and determine to do good, well that’s when he sins. That’s where we see the difference between the animal part and wretched flesh; for, I ask you, what difference is there between a person without reason and an animal? There’s none.

“*Or sus*, wretch that I am, I have good reason to be ashamed before God, all the more so because there’s no sin committed in the

¹According to Abelly (*op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. V, p. 21), Saint Vincent was referring to himself.

²According to Abelly (*ibid.*, p. 23.), the saint says “six years” in another place.

house for which I'm not guilty! Even today I was so wretched as to give in to some indulgence. I'll tell you about that shortly. . . . An excellent remark has just been made, namely, that it's self-love that keeps us from accepting admonitions in the right way. Oh, how true that is! 'Take away self-will,' said Saint Bernard, 'and there will be no more hell.' Take away that self-love that can't bear the smallest thing and makes the person so sensitive that he can't endure the slightest rebuke without losing his temper. Let's give ourselves to God once and for all to bear with all the admonitions that will be given us."

Wanting to get back to what he had been saying previously about the self-complacency he had, M. Vincent then said, "What did I say not long ago that I would mention? Do you recall, M. Alméras? Don't you remember, Messieurs? *Mon Dieu!* What is it? Doesn't anyone remember?"

A Brother stood up and said, "Monsieur, it was about some self-satisfaction you said you had today."

"Ah, you're right! So then, here's what happened to me. It's customary to read to the gathering of the Ladies of Charity what's being done to help the poor people in the border towns of Champagne and Picardy from letters sent to us by Bro. Jean Parre,³ who sees to the distribution of the weekly alms those good Ladies send there. Today, a letter was read in which mention was made of the good God is doing through this good Brother. Reference was made to a group of the most notable women in the town of Reims, whom this good Brother had brought together to take care of the needy poor people and orphans of the town and its environs; he then did the same thing in Saint-Quentin, where the Ladies are not yet as numerous as in Reims. Now, since Mme Talon⁴ had returned here from that area with her son, who was recalled in order to resume his duty

³Born in Châtillon-en-Dunois (Eure-et-Loir), Jean Parre entered the Congregation of the Mission on April 16, 1638, at twenty-seven years of age, took his vows in 1643, and died after 1660. He and Bro. Mathieu Régnard were two of the most intelligent and active instruments that Divine Providence placed in Saint Vincent's hands. Bro. Parre traveled all over Picardy and Champagne assessing and remedying needs. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. II, pp. 223-40.)

⁴Françoise Doujat, widow of Omer Talon, Solicitor General at the Parlement. She died on April 17, 1667.

of Solicitor General in the Court of the Parlement of Paris, she came to the meeting today, and when she saw that they were talking about the good being done there by that good Brother, she took the floor and began to tell them everything she had seen and heard there, the good that good Brother is doing, and how God is blessing his way of acting and his projects, such as establishing those meetings of the Ladies I just mentioned, for the assistance of poor persons, the assistance the poor orphans are receiving, and how he found for the assembly of the Ladies of Reims a good priest, a Canon from Reims, whom he judged most suitable to direct and accompany it in order to encourage it in this holy work. Now, when one of those Ladies from the assembly here heard Mme Talon telling this today, she exclaimed and said, 'If the Brothers of the Mission are so successful in doing the good we've just heard, what will the priests not do!' That, my dear confreres, is what caused me, wretch that I am, to give in to that self-satisfaction I've just mentioned to you, instead of referring it all to God, from whom all good comes."

And turning to the coadjutor Brothers, he said, "Brothers, you mustn't take any glory or complacency from what I've just said about what our Brother is doing; for you see, God makes use of whomever He pleases, of a wicked man as well as an upright one, even so far as to work miracles, as some hold that Judas did, he who betrayed Our Lord. I'm saying this to you, Brothers, so that you'll be careful to refer always to God all the glory of the good Our Lord will do for the Company in general or for each one of you and of the members that compose it in particular. May God be pleased to grant this grace to all of us!"

152. - THE SPIRIT OF MERCY AND COMPASSION

August 6 [1656]

“When we go to visit poor persons, we have to sympathize with them in order to suffer with them, and put ourselves in the dispositions of that great Apostle, who said, *Omnibus omnia factus sum*;¹ I have made myself all to all, so that the complaint Our Lord formerly made through one of the Prophets, *Sustinui qui simul mecum contristaretur, et non fuit*² doesn’t fall on us: ‘I waited to see if someone would sympathize with me in my sufferings, and there was none.’ For that purpose, we have to try to stir our hearts to pity, make them sensitive to the sufferings and miseries of our neighbor, and ask God to give us the true spirit of mercy, which is the characteristic spirit of God; for, as the Church states, it’s the distinctive feature of God to be merciful and to impart His Spirit. So let’s ask God, my dear confreres, to give us this spirit of compassion and mercy, to fill us with it, and to preserve it in us so that whoever sees a Missioner can say, ‘There’s a man full of mercy.’ Let’s reflect a little on how much we need mercy, since we have to practice it toward others and bring it to all sorts of places, and to suffer everything for its sake.

“How fortunate are our confreres in Poland, who have suffered so much during these latest wars and during the plague, and who are still suffering from practicing corporal and spiritual mercy and relieving, assisting, and consoling the poor! Fortunate Missioners, whom neither cannons, nor fire, nor weapons, nor the plague could drive out of Warsaw, where the misery of others was keeping them. For the sake of mercy they persevered, and still persevere courageously, in the midst of so many dangers and sufferings! How for-

Conference 152. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, sect. II, p. 121. *Recueil de diverses exhortations*, which gives the first part of this instruction, dates it August 6; comparison with Conf. 157 allows us to establish the year.

¹I have made myself all things to all men. Cf. 1 Cor 9:22. (NAB)

²I looked for sympathy, but there was none. Cf. Ps 69:21. (NAB)

tunate they are to make such good use of this instant of time in our lives for the sake of mercy! Yes, this very instant, for our whole life is but a fleeting moment, which disappears immediately. Alas, the seventy-six years of life I've lived seem to me now only a dream, only an instant; and nothing more is left to me but the regret of having made such poor use of this moment. Let's think about the deep sorrow we'll have at the hour of death, if we don't use this moment to be merciful.

“So then, let's be merciful, brothers, and let's practice mercy toward everyone, so that we'll never meet a poor person again without consoling him if we can, or an ignorant man without teaching him in a few words the things he must believe and do for his salvation. O Savior, don't allow us to abuse our vocation, and don't take the spirit of mercy from this Company; for what would become of us if You were to withdraw Your mercy from it? Give it to us, then, together with the spirit of gentleness and humility.”

153. - ADVICE TO ANTOINE DURAND, NAMED SUPERIOR
OF THE AGDE SEMINARY¹

[1656]

“O Monsieur, how great—how very great—do you think is the duty of direction of souls to which God is calling you? What do you think the occupation of the Priests of the Mission is, obliged as they are to oversee and guide persons whose motivations are known to God alone? *Ars artium, regimen animarum*: the direction of souls is the art of arts. That was the work of the Son of God on earth; it was the reason why He came down from heaven, was born of a Virgin, gave every moment of His life, and, in the end, suffered a very painful death. That’s why you must have a very high esteem for what you’re going to do.

“But how can you carry out this ministry of guiding souls to God, of halting the torrent of vices of a people or the faults of a seminary, of inspiring sentiments of Christian and priestly virtues in those whom Providence will entrust to you to contribute to their salvation or to their perfection? There’s certainly nothing human in that, Monsieur; it’s not the work of a man, it’s the work of a God, *grande opus*. It’s the continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ; consequently, all human diligence can do here is to spoil every-

Conference 153. -Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XXIV, sect. III, p. 360ff.

¹Collet (*op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 316) gives the name of the confrere to whom this advice was given.

Antoine Durand, born in Beaumont-sur-Oise (Val-d'Oise) in April 1629, entered the Congregation of the Mission on September 15, 1647, took his vows in 1651, and was ordained a priest in September 1654, a few days after his arrival in Poland. He returned to France in 1655, was assigned to Agde, and became Superior there the following year. The Province of Savoy sent him as its delegate to the General Assembly in 1661. In 1662 he was put in charge of the house and parish in Fontainebleau, a very important and delicate position because of the dealings the Pastor was obliged to have with the Court. In his interesting memoirs, published by Abbé Octave Estournet (*Journal de Antoine Durand, prêtre de la Mission, premier curé de Fontainebleau (1661-67)* [Fontainebleau: Libr. cathol., 1900]), he retraces the events in which he was involved during his stay in Fontainebleau. From there Durand went to Agde (1679-81), then to Dijon (1681-83), Sedan (1683-90), Saint-Cyr (1691-92), and the Arras Seminary (1692-95); in all these places he was Superior. Despite his advanced age, he was given the duty of Secretary General, which he performed until 1707. For two years he was also Director of the Daughters of Charity. Besides his memoirs, he wrote three books, still in manuscript form: *Vie de Julienne Loret, Fille de la Charité; Livre contenant les marques d'un homme juste* (Bibl. Maz., MS. 1250, and *Réflexions sur les masques, le bal et les danses*, (MS. 1679). The exact date of his death is not known. His biography is in *Notices*, vol. II, pp. 389-424.

thing, if God doesn't take a hand in it. No, Monsieur, neither philosophy, nor theology, nor discourses can act in souls; Jesus Christ must be involved in this with us—or we with Him—so that we may act in Him and He in us, that we may speak as He did and in His Spirit, as He himself was in His Father, and preached the doctrine He had taught Him; those are the words of Holy Scripture.

“So, Monsieur, you must empty yourself of self in order to clothe yourself with Jesus Christ. You know that ordinary causes produce the effects of their nature: a sheep produces a sheep, etc., and a human another human; likewise, if the man who directs and forms others and speaks to them is animated with only a human spirit, those who see him, listen to him, and strive to imitate him will become totally human: no matter what he says and does, he'll inspire them with only the appearance of virtue, and not the substance; he'll communicate to them the spirit with which he himself is animated, as we see that masters impress their maxims and ways of acting firmly on the minds of their disciples.

“On the contrary, if a Superior is filled with God and with the maxims of Our Lord, all his words will be efficacious; virtue will go out of him that will edify others, and all his actions will be so many beneficial instructions that will bring about good in those who are aware of them.

“To reach that point, Monsieur, Our Lord himself has to imprint firmly on you His stamp and His character. For, just as we see a wild stock, on which a seedling has been grafted, bear the fruits of the nature of this same seedling, we, too, wretched creatures, even though we're only flesh, hay, and thorns, yet if Our Lord imprints His own character on us, and gives us, so to speak, the sap of His Spirit and grace, uniting us to Him like the vine branches to the vine stock, we do the same as He did on earth—I mean we carry out divine actions and, like Saint Paul, filled with this Spirit, beget children to Our Lord.

“Something important to which you must faithfully devote yourself is to be closely united with Our Lord in meditation; that's the reservoir where you'll find the instructions you need to carry out the ministry you're going to have. When you have a doubt, turn

to God and say to Him, ‘Lord, You who are the Father of Lights, teach me what I must do on this occasion.’

“I’m giving you this advice, not only for the difficulties that will cause you suffering, but also so you may learn directly from God what you’ll have to teach, in imitation of Moses, who proclaimed to the people of Israel only what God had inspired him to say: *Haec dicit Dominus*.

“Furthermore, you must have recourse to God through meditation in order to preserve your soul in His fear and love; for, alas, Monsieur, I’m obliged to tell you—and you must know this—that people are often lost while contributing to the salvation of others. The person who forgets himself while being occupied with external things does well on his own account. Saul was found worthy of being King because he was living well in his father’s house; yet, after having been raised to the throne, he fell miserably from the grace of God. Saint Paul chastised his body for fear that, after having preached to others and shown them the path of salvation, he himself might become a reprobate.

“Now, in order not to fall into the misfortune of Saul or Judas, you must be inseparably attached to Our Lord and say often, raising your heart and mind to Him, ‘O Lord, do not allow me, in trying to save others, to be unfortunately lost myself; be my Shepherd, and do not deny me the graces you impart to others through my instrumentality and the functions of my ministry.’

“You must also have recourse to meditation to ask Our Lord for the needs of those whom you’ll be guiding. Rest assured that you’ll produce greater results by this means than by any other. Jesus Christ, who must be your model in all your ways of acting, was not satisfied with His sermons, His works, His fasts, His blood, and even His death, but He added meditation to all that. He had no need of it for himself; it was, then, for us that He prayed so often, and to teach us to do the same, both for our personal concerns and for what concerns those whose saviors we must be, together with Him.

“Another thing I recommend to you is the humility of Our Lord. Say often, ‘Lord, what have I done to have such a ministry? What works of mine correspond to the responsibility being placed on my

shoulders? Ah, my God, I'll spoil everything if You yourself don't guide all my words and works!' Let's always view all that's human and imperfect in ourselves, and we'll find only too much for which to humble ourselves, not only before God, but also before others and in the presence of those who are subject to us.

"Above all, don't feel that you have to appear as the Superior or master. I'm not of the opinion of the person who said to me a few days ago that, to govern well and maintain your authority, you must make it clear that you're the Superior. *O mon Dieu!* Our Lord Jesus Christ didn't talk like that; He taught us just the opposite by word and example, telling us that He himself had come, not to be served, but to serve others, and that whoever wanted to be the master must be the servant of all.

"So then, adopt that holy maxim, acting toward those with whom you're going to live *quasi unus ex illis*,² telling them from the outset that you haven't come to lord it over them but rather to serve them; do that inside and outside the house, and you'll do well.

"In addition, we should always refer to God the good that's done through us, and, on the contrary, attribute to ourselves all the harm that's done in the Community. Yes, remember that all disorders proceed mainly from the Superior, who, by his negligence or bad example, introduces infractions of the Rule, just as all the members of the body languish when the head isn't well.

"Humility should incline you also to avoid all self-satisfaction, which slips mainly into works that have some glory in them. O Monsieur, how dangerous to good works is the venom of vain complacency! It's a plague that corrupts the holiest actions and soon causes us to forget God. In the name of God, be on your guard against this failing, since it's one of the things that presents the greatest danger I know to advancement in the spiritual life and perfection.

"For this purpose, give yourself to God so that you'll speak in the humble spirit of Jesus Christ, acknowledging that your doctrine isn't your own, nor coming from you but from the Gospel. Imitate espe-

²As if you were one of them.

cially the simplicity of the words and comparisons Our Lord uses in Holy Scripture when He speaks to the people. What wonderful things could He not have taught the people! What secrets could He not have revealed about the Divinity and its admirable perfections, He who was the Eternal Wisdom of His Father! Nevertheless, you see how plainly He speaks and how He uses familiar comparisons—a farmer, a wine grower, a field, a vineyard, a mustard seed. That’s how you must speak if you want to make yourself understood by the people to whom you’ll be announcing God’s word.

“Something else to which you must pay very close attention is to be very dependent on the guidance of the Son of God; I mean that, when you have to take action, you should make this reflection: ‘Is this in conformity with the maxims of the Son of God?’ If you see that it is, then say, ‘Fine, let’s do it.’ If it isn’t, then say, ‘I’ll do nothing of the sort.’

“Furthermore, when there’s question of doing some good work, say to the Son of God, ‘Lord, if You were in my place, how would you act on this occasion? How would you instruct these people? How would you console this person sick in mind or body?’

“This dependence must extend also to showing great deference to those who represent Our Lord to you and who serve as your Superiors. Believe me, their experience and the grace that Jesus Christ in His goodness imparts to them because of their duty have taught them many things regarding leadership. I’m telling you this to urge you to do nothing important or to undertake nothing extraordinary without informing us of it; or, if the matter should be so urgent that you might not have time to wait for our solution, to go to the nearest Superior and ask him, ‘Monsieur, what would you do in such a circumstance?’ Our experience is that God has blessed the leadership of those who have acted in that way, whereas, on the contrary, those who acted otherwise became involved in matters that not only caused them trouble but also even embarrassed us.

“I also ask you to take care not to try to distinguish yourself in your leadership. I don’t want you to do anything unusual, but always to follow the *viam regiam*—the common way—in order to proceed confidently and without reproach. By that I mean that you should conform

yourself in everything to the Rules and holy customs of the Congregation. Don't introduce anything new, but reflect on the advice drawn up for those responsible for the houses of the Company, and don't do away with anything that's being done in the same Company.

"Be not only faithful to observing the Rules, but also exact in having them observed; for otherwise everything will go badly. In addition, since you hold the place of Our Lord, in imitation of Him you must also be a light that enlightens and warms. 'Jesus Christ,' says Saint Paul, 'is the splendor of the Father,' and Saint John says that He's the light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.

"We see that superior causes influence inferior ones. For example, the angels who are in a superior hierarchy enlighten, illumine, and perfect the intelligences of a lower hierarchy; likewise, the Superior, Pastor, and Director must purge, illuminate, and unite to God the souls entrusted to him on the part of God himself.

"And, just as the heavens send their benign influences on the earth, those who are above others must pour out on them the principal spirit that should animate them. For that purpose you must be filled with grace, light, and good works, just as we see that the sun communicates the fullness of its brightness to the other stars. In a word, you must be like salt: *Vos estis sal terrae*,³ preventing corruption from slipping into the flock of which you'll be the shepherd."

After M. Vincent had told me all of the above, with a zeal and charity I can't express, a Brother of the Company arrived and spoke to him about some temporal matter involving the Saint-Lazare house. When the Brother left, he took the opportunity to give me the following advice: "You see, Monsieur, how I have to pass from the things of God, of which we were just speaking, to temporal matters; you must know from this that it's up to the Superior to provide not only for spiritual matters but also to extend his concern to temporal matters; for, since those whom he has to guide are composed of body and soul, he has to provide for the needs of both, after the example of God, who, being occupied from all eternity with begetting

³*You are the salt of the earth.* Cf. Mt 5:13. (NAB)

His Son, both the Father and the Son produced the Holy Spirit. I repeat that, in addition to those divine operations *ad intra*, He created the world *ad extra*, and is constantly occupied with preserving it and all that depends on it, and every year produces new seeds in the ground, new fruit on the trees, etc. And the same concern of His adorable Providence is extended even to that, so that no leaf falls from a tree without His order; He counts every hair of our head and feeds even the tiniest vermin—even a mite. I think this is a powerful consideration to help you to understand that you mustn't devote yourself only to lofty things, such as functions concerned with spiritual matters, but a Superior, who represents in a certain sense the extent of the power of God, must also apply himself to taking care of the slightest temporal matters, not thinking that this care may be something unworthy of him. So, give yourself to God to procure the temporal good of the house to which you're going.

"In the beginning, when Our Lord sent out His Apostles, he recommended that they not take any money with them; but later, when the number of His disciples increased, He willed that there be one of the group *qui loculos haberet*,⁴ and would take care not only of giving food to the poor, but also of providing for the needs of His family. Furthermore, he allowed women to follow Him for the same purpose, *quae ministrabant ei*;⁵ and, if He gives orders in the Gospel not to worry about tomorrow, that should be interpreted to mean not to be too anxious or concerned about worldly goods, and absolutely not to neglect the means of keeping ourselves alive and clothing ourselves; otherwise, there would be no point in sowing any seed.

"On that I'll finish; it's enough for today. I repeat once again that what you're about to do is a very great work: *grande opus*. I ask Our Lord to bless your leadership and I ask you, on your part, to join me in praying that He'll forgive me all the faults I myself have committed in my own ministry."

⁴Who would have power over the coffers.

⁵Who ministered to him. Cf. Lk 8:3. (NAB)

**154. - NEWS FROM POLAND; GOD'S PLAN FOR THE EXTENSION
OF THE CHURCH**

September 1656

“We will humble ourselves profoundly before God because, if the rumors circulating are true, He has once more willed to postpone the good for which we’ve been hoping and praying so often and so earnestly, for our sins are doubtless the cause of this. Rumor has it—as of yet uncertain and unconfirmed—that not only are the disturbances in Poland still not settled, but also that the King, with an army of nearly 100,000 men, went into battle, which he lost.¹ A nobleman in the court of Poland had written me that the Queen² was going off to meet the King and was only two days’ journey from the army. His letter is dated July 28, and the rumor is circulating that the battle took place on the 30th. If that’s correct, the Queen might not be safe.

“O my dear confreres, how ashamed we should be that our sins have dissuaded God from answering our prayers! Let’s grieve for that great, vast kingdom, which is being attacked so fiercely and, if the news is true, is on the verge of being destroyed. But let’s also grieve for the Church, which is going to be lost in that country if the King is defeated; for religion can be maintained only if the King is preserved, and the Church is about to fall into the hands of its enemies in that kingdom. The Muscovite already holds more than 100-120 leagues of territory, and now the rest is in danger of being invaded by the Swedes.

“That gives me great reason to fear the consequences of what Pope Clement VIII was trying to intimate. He was a holy man respected not only by Catholics, but also even by heretics, a man of

Conference 154. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. X, pp. 196ff.

¹The rumor was well founded. The Swedish army of Karl-Gustav defeated Jan Casimir and after a three-day siege took Warsaw on August 1.

²Despite her attachment to the Jansenist party, Louise-Marie de Gonzague, a former Lady of Charity, wife of King Wladyslaw IV, then of his brother, Jan Casimir, held Saint Vincent in the highest esteem. She summoned to Poland the Priests of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the Visitation Nuns, gave them housing, took care that nothing was wanting to them, and never failed to protect them. She died in 1667.

God and of peace, whom his own enemies praised. I personally have heard Lutherans praise and esteem his virtue. So, when this holy Pope had received two ambassadors on behalf of certain Princes from the East, where the faith was beginning to spread, and wanting to thank God for this in their presence, he offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for their intention. While he was at the altar, saying the *Memento*, they saw him begin to weep, sigh, and sob, which greatly surprised them. The result was that, when Mass was over, they took the liberty of asking him what had moved him to weep and groan during an action that should have caused him only consolation and joy. And he told them quite simply that it was true that he had begun the Mass with great satisfaction and contentment, seeing how the Catholic religion was spreading, but this contentment suddenly changed to sadness and bitterness in view of the waste and losses occurring daily to the Church on the part of heretics; therefore, there was good reason to fear that God might want to transfer it elsewhere.

“We have to adopt these sentiments, my dear confreres, and fear that the kingdom of God may be taken from us. What we see before our very eyes is a deplorable misfortune: six kingdoms taken from the Church, namely, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, England, Scotland, and Ireland; and, besides that, Holland, a large part of the Germanies, and several of those great Hanseatic towns.³ *O Sauveur!* What a loss! And with all that we’re still on the eve of seeing the great kingdom of Poland lost, if God, by His mercy, doesn’t preserve it from all that.

“It’s quite true that the Son of God promised that He’d be with His Church until the end of time; but He didn’t promise that this Church would be in France or in Spain, etc. He did say that He wouldn’t abandon His Church and that it would last until the end of the world, in whatever place it may be, but not specifically here or elsewhere. And if there were a country in which He should have left it, it seems like none should be preferred to the Holy Land, where He was born, where He began His Church, did so much, and per-

³The towns of northern Germany and adjacent countries that belonged to the Hanseatic League, founded in the Middle Ages, for the promotion and protection of commerce.

formed so many miracles. Yet, it was this land, for which He did so much and in which He took such pleasure, that He deprived of His Church first of all, in order to give it to the Gentiles. In ages past, it was also from the children of that same land that He took His Ark, allowing it to be seized by their enemy the Philistines, preferring, so to speak, to be made a prisoner with His Ark—yes, He himself a prisoner of His enemies—than to remain among friends who were constantly offending Him. See how God acted and acts daily toward those so indebted to Him for so many graces, provoking Him by all sorts of offenses, as we do, wretched men that we are. And woe to those people to whom God says, ‘I no longer want you or your sacrifices and offerings; neither your devotions nor your fasts can please me, I want nothing to do with them. You have tarnished everything by your sins; I abandon you; go, I will have nothing more to do with you!’ Ah, Messieurs, what a misfortune!

“But, *Sauveur!* What a grace to be among those whom God uses to transmit His blessings and His Church! Let’s look at this through the comparison of an unfortunate Lord who sees himself constrained by necessity, war, the plague, the torching of his houses, or the disfavor of a Prince, to go off and flee, and who, in this ruin of all his fortune, sees persons coming to help him, offering to serve him and to transport all that he has. What satisfaction and consolation for that nobleman in his misfortune! Ah, my dear confreres, what joy God will have if, in the devastation of His Church, in those upheavals caused by heresies, in the inferno concupiscence is establishing everywhere; if, amid this destruction, there are a few persons who volunteer to transfer elsewhere, so to speak, the remnant of His Church, and others to defend and guard the little that’s left here! O Savior, what joy You receive at seeing such servants and such fervor in holding fast and defending what remains to You here, while others go off to acquire new lands for You! O Messieurs, what a source of joy! You see how conquerors leave one part of their troops to guard their possessions, and send the other to acquire new places and extend their empire. That’s what we have to do: to courageously maintain here the possessions of the Church and the interests of Jesus Christ, and, with all that, to work unceas-

ingly to make new conquests for Him and to make Him known by people in the most far-flung places.

“One day, an author of heresy⁴ said to me, ‘God has finally grown weary of the sins of all those lands, He’s angry and is determined to take the faith away from us because we’ve made ourselves unworthy of it.’ And he added, ‘Wouldn’t it be rash to oppose God’s plans and to want to defend the Church He was determined to destroy? As for me,’ he added, ‘I intend to work for this destruction.’ Alas, Messieurs, perhaps what he was saying was true when he said that God wanted to take the Church from us because of our sins! But this author of heresy was mistaken in saying that it was rash to be in opposition to God in that and to work to preserve and defend His Church; for God asks for this and it must be done: there’s no rashness in fasting, being sorry, praying to appease God’s anger, and fighting to the finish in order to sustain and defend the Church, wherever it is. If, until now, our efforts appear to have been in vain because of our sins—at least from what it seems—that must not cause us to give up, but rather, humbling ourselves profoundly, we must continue our fasts, Communions, and prayers with all the good servants of God who pray constantly for the same purpose. And we have to hope that God, in His great mercy, will, in the end, let himself be softened and hear our prayers. So then, let’s humble ourselves as much as we can, in view of our sins; but let’s have confidence—great confidence—in God, who wills that we continue more and more to pray for that poor kingdom of Poland in such distress and to acknowledge that everything depends on Him and His grace.”

⁴Jean du Verger de Hauranne, Abbé de Saint-Cyran, was born in Bayonne in 1581. He had met Saint Vincent in Paris around 1622 and soon struck up a friendship with him. According to his nephew, Martin de Barcos (cf. *Défense de feu M. Vincent de Paul*), he had supposedly rendered important services to the saint, and the Congregation of the Mission was in some measure indebted to him for the possession of the Collège des Bons-Enfants and for Saint-Lazare, as well as for the Bull of Approval obtained from the Roman Court. What is certain is that their meetings, rather frequent while Saint Vincent was living at the Bons-Enfants, became more rare after 1632 and almost ceased from 1634 on. In 1638 Saint-Cyran was arrested on the authority of Cardinal Richelieu and imprisoned at the Château de Vincennes. Shortly after the Cardinal died in 1642, Louis XIII allowed the prisoner to communicate with people outside. This measure of clemency was soon followed by a second: on February 16, 1643, Saint-Cyran was set free. He did not enjoy the royal favor for long, however, dying of a cerebral hemorrhage on October 11, 1643.

155. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

October 18, 1656

After listening to four members of the Company make Repetition of Prayer on the Gospel of that same day,² M. Vincent said he had noted that “at meditation the Company didn’t pay sufficient attention to the aim of each meditation, since it’s certain that each meditation has its principal aim, which we must always have in mind when we begin meditation, and say to ourselves, ‘*Or sus*, what’s the aim of this meditation? Why is this topic proposed to us, etc.?’ For, in meditation, we should always consider, as in everything else, the aim of what is being proposed, that is, the glory given to God from it or how good and useful it will be to the neighbor.

“For example, the subject of today’s meditation places before us the choice and mission of the disciples, and how Our Lord recommends that we ask the Master of the harvest to send workers, and He recommends to those same disciples that they carry neither traveling bag, nor purse, nor shoes. Now, we had to consider what might have prompted Our Lord to order His disciples to do that, what He meant by it, what use Our Lord saw in it that could be for His glory and the welfare of His Church and of His disciples, and, on the contrary, the harm He foresaw that might otherwise ensue. So then, the aim of this meditation is to stir us up to ask God to send good workers into His vineyard, good priests, good Missioners truly detached from themselves and from worldly goods, money, and conveniences, and to see if we’re in the state Our Lord requires of Gospel workers. Some of those who just made repetition touched on this briefly; others did not. Above all, don’t spend much time in reasoning but spend much, much time in praying. After pondering what I’ve just said, raise your heart to God and say to Him, ‘Lord, send Your Church good workers, but they should be really good ones;

Conference 155. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 42.

¹*Subheading*: Meditation; news of Missioners in Poland; needs of the Madagascar mission.

²Feast of Saint Luke.

send good Missioners, men such as they should be, to work hard in Your vineyard; persons, my God, truly detached from themselves, their own ease, and worldly goods; they can be a smaller number, provided they're good. Grant Your Church this grace, Lord. Put in me all the conditions You desire in Your disciples, such as that of having no attachment to worldly goods, etc.'

"By the grace of God, it's a practice in the Company not to carry any money since only one man is designated to do so; he keeps the money and is responsible for paying whatever's necessary for the whole Company and for providing for all the necessities and individual needs of the members of the Company: clothing, food, or other things. Besides, we've taken a vow of poverty, which obliges us to leave our income to the disposition of the Company, or to our relatives if they're poor, or, if we have no needy relatives, to dispose of it and give it to whomever we deem fitting. So in this you see that, by the grace of God, the Company is in the second state in which Our Lord wanted His Apostles to be, both being equally perfect in the case of Our Lord. I mean the state in which He willed the disciples to be, which was to have neither traveling bag, money, etc.; and the other, which was that they were to have enough for their food and maintenance; for Our Lord himself and the Apostles had people—deacons, and good, charitable women—who followed them and supplied what was needed for their food and subsistence, and He allowed those same Apostles and disciples to have enough to live on. Now, God, who inspired the Capuchin Fathers, for example, to embrace that first state mentioned in this meditation, has inspired other religious and Communities to live in this second state, which is the one in which it has pleased God that the Company should be.

"Why, Messieurs, do you think Our Lord willed that His disciples should go out two by two? It's because, since He recommended that each individual practice charity toward his neighbor, and that this neighbor presupposes a second person, He sent them two by two so that they might each constantly practice charity toward one another, and, if one of them were to fall, there would be someone to help him up, or to encourage him in his labors, if he

grew weary and exhausted. O my dear confreres, how admirable is the guidance of the Son of God!

“I’ve had news from Poland. M. Ozenne³ has written to tell me the state Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy⁴ are in, and what has happened in Warsaw. Several times I had recommended that you pray for them because we heard rumors from that city that they had been killed when the Swedes returned to Warsaw following the battle they won against the Poles; but, because this wasn’t confirmed, I didn’t tell you about it. Now, M. Ozenne writes me that, by the grace of God, they’re fine but have lost everything; for, after the victory won by the Swedes about two months ago, those same Swedes, who had been routed from that city by the King of Poland, went back there and pillaged everything; then they went on to Holy Cross rectory, where the Missioners live. There, they seized everything and carried off whatever they could find, leaving Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy with nothing. The main thing is that Our Lord preserved their lives.

³Charles Ozenne, born in Nibas (Somme) on April 15, 1613, was ordained a priest in 1637 and entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 10, 1638. After his Internal Seminary (novitiate), he was assigned to Troyes, where he took his vows on August 29, 1642, and became Superior in 1644. Saint Vincent recalled him in 1653 to head the mission in Poland. “He is a zealous and detached man of God,” he wrote to Nicolas Guillot, “with a talent for leadership and for winning hearts within the Company and outside of it.” (Cf. *IV*, 573.) Unfortunately, this excellent Missioner’s career was brief: he died in Warsaw on August 14, 1658. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 148-54.)

⁴Guillaume Desdames, born in Rouen, entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 19, 1645, at twenty-three years of age, took his vows on March 10, 1648, and was ordained a priest on May 31, 1648. He was stationed in Toul shortly afterward, then sent to Poland, where he arrived with Lambert aux Couteaux in November 1651. He worked there with praiseworthy dedication amid numerous difficulties; after the death of Charles Ozenne (August 14, 1658), he became Superior of the Mission. René Almérás recalled him to France in 1669, but he returned to Poland a few years later to assume the direction of the house in Chelmno. He returned to France for the General Assembly of 1685. Desdames ended his days as Superior of the foundation in Krakow on June 1, 1692. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, p. 166, and *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission* [11 vols., Paris, 1863-99], vol. I, pp. 24-33.)

Nicolas Duperroy, born in Maulévrier (Seine-Maritime) on January 16, 1625, entered the Congregation of the Mission on September 13, 1651, was ordained a priest on April 4, 1654, and took his vows on December 13, 1663. After the capture of Warsaw, he was brutally mistreated by the Swedes and left for dead, caught the plague twice, and suffered for a long time from a painful physical condition. René Almérás appointed him Superior in 1670. His house sent him as delegate to the General Assembly of 1673. Returning to Poland, he continued as Superior until 1674, after which there is no further trace of him.

“I ask the Company, with all the affection of which I’m capable, to thank God for having been pleased to preserve for the Company those two servants of His; they’re two people in whom I can say that, as far as I can recall, we’ve never found anything to criticize. At the same time, let’s offer ourselves to Our Lord to endure all the afflictions that will present themselves. Let’s ask Him earnestly for this grace, my dear confreres, not only for each one of us in particular, but also for the whole Company in general. The Queen sent them word to come to see her, and Her Majesty was already beginning to collect a supply of linen and other clothing they needed. Those are the kind of workers we need.

“Recently I was telling you that Maréchal de la Meilleraye had written to me—or had someone write to me—because I was sending him only one priest, whereas there were 12,000 souls awaiting conversion to our holy religion in Madagascar. ‘*Eh quoi!*’ he said, ‘Does M. Vincent want to abandon in this way 12,000 souls who are just waiting for some priests in order to be converted?’

“By the way, I remind our coadjutor Brothers and seminarians of what I already said to the priests, namely, that they’re not to say ‘our Messieurs,’ but rather ‘the priests,’ when they want to speak about certain members of the Company.”

156. - BEHAVIOR WHEN GOING INTO TOWN

October 27, 1656

The conference presented the reasons the Company had for behaving properly when going into the city; the second point concerned the faults that may be committed there; and the third point gave remedies for these faults.

M. Vincent strongly recommended that the members of the Company behave with the greatest possible reserve in order not to scandalize anyone, and that they shouldn't wear their cloaks in a rakish way that's contrary to ecclesiastical modesty. He said that the members of the Tuesday Conferences had a conference on this topic, and since that time he hadn't heard that anyone had failed to wear his cloak other than with the decorum and modesty of true ecclesiastics. He added that no one should choose his companion or ask for this man or that, but be satisfied with the one the Superior gives him. To that end, he renewed the firm resolution he had made of never giving any member of the Company who was going into town the person he requested as a companion.

And turning to Messrs. Alméras and Admirault the Officers he said, "And I ask you, Messieurs, never to give men going into the city the persons they request as companions; for you see, Messieurs, this can have serious consequences because it's never done without a certain reason. The fact is that we've seen examples of it in some men who are no longer in the Company and what ensued. I recall, among others, someone who was always asking for a certain man as companion; and why? So they could go to the tavern. They didn't do that for long!¹ Or else it's to go to this or that house, where they don't want the Superior to know, and that's against the Rule, which is, etc."

He added that we must conduct ourselves with great discretion and modesty in the business we have to transact or handle. If it's with a Magistrate, we should consider God's justice in him; if it's

Conference 156. - Repetitions of Prayer. MS, f° 43 v°.

¹*In the margin:* "Note: The persons of whom M. Vincent was speaking were soon obliged to leave the Company because of such faults."

the King—should we be in a position to do that—to consider the majesty of God in him. Thus, we should consider the state of each of the persons with whom we have to deal and foresee the way we should act, the manner of conducting business with or talking to them, etc.

Afterward M. Vincent asked pardon of the Company because, for want of behaving properly himself, he failed to do a lot of good, which he might have done if he had acted properly and as he could and should have done; in addition, he might have avoided a lot of harm resulting from the faults of scandal he had caused; and he went down on his knees for this.

He said, furthermore, that we should go to greet Our Lord on leaving the house to go out and on our return home.²

157. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

November 2 and 3, 1656

M. Vincent strongly recommended to all the seminarians and students that they learn how to chant, saying that it's one of the things a priest must know. "*Quoi*," he added, "isn't it shameful to see that peasants know how to chant and do it very well, and we don't? And having learned that the students were no longer learning chant and that this practice had been discontinued, he exclaimed and said, "O my God, what an account I'll have to give you for so many things that are not being done through my fault! Alas, how come we've stopped having this observed? M. Almérás and M. Berthe, please have a meeting for this purpose; ask M. Portail to join you in order to discuss the means of seeing that no one completes his seminary and his studies unless he knows how to chant.

²*In the margin:* "Note: M. Vincent said many other things, which I have not written down; perhaps someone else will have done it."

Conference 157. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 44.

¹*Subheading:* Reproach for negligence in the study of chant; news of the Daughters of Charity; perseverance in works of mercy; praise for Missioners in Warsaw and Rome.

“Really, what a fine state of affairs it is when people, students destined to teach in seminaries, don’t know how to chant! And how can they teach it to others if they themselves don’t know it! An important Prelate has done me the honor of writing to express to me his desire to establish in his diocese not only one seminary but two or three, and he mentions the Company for this purpose. And what kind of people is he requesting? They’re men who don’t know how to chant! God be praised for the idea He just gave me to speak about that to the Company and the request M. Dehorgny just made to me to ask the Company to pray for his collège.²

“I also recommend to the prayers of the Company a good Daughter of Charity, a fine servant of God, who is critically and seriously ill, and another one, whom the Queen³ has requested for the hospital in La Fère, but who is also ill. She’s another good servant of God, and it would be a great loss to that Little Company if she were to die. You can’t imagine how God is blessing them everywhere and in how many places they’re desired. The Bishop of Tréguier⁴ is asking me for eight of them for three hospitals; the Bishop of Cahors,⁵ on the other hand, wants some for two hospitals he has opened in Cahors; the Bishop of Agde⁶ is also asking for

²The Collège des Bons-Enfants.

³The Queen Regent, Anne of Austria.

⁴Balthazar Grangier de Liverdi.

⁵Alain de Solminihac was born in the Château de Belet in Périgord on November 25, 1593. He was only twenty-two when one of his uncles resigned in his favor Chancelade Abbey (Dordogne), which depended on the Order of Canons Regular of Saint Augustine. He replaced the old buildings and had discipline restored. On January 21, 1630, Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld sent him full powers to make visitations of the houses of the Canons of Saint Augustine in the dioceses of Périgueux, Limoges, Saintes, Angoulême, and Maillezais. Solminihac was sought after in many places to establish the reform. Appointed to the Cahors diocese on June 17, 1636, he procured for his people the benefit of missions, visited the parishes of his diocese regularly, established a seminary for the formation of his clergy, entrusting its direction to the sons of Saint Vincent. By the time he died on December 21, 1659, the Cahors diocese was completely renewed. Since God had manifested his sanctity by several miracles, his cause was introduced in Rome at the request of the clergy of France. (Cf. Léonard Chastenet, *La vie de Mgr. Alain de Solminihac* [new ed., Saint-Brieuc: Prud’homme, 1817]; Abel de Valon, *Histoire d’Alain de Solminihac, évêque de Cahors* [Cahors: Delsaud, 1900].) He was beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 4, 1981.

⁶François Fouquet was the son of another François Fouquet, Comte de Vaux, and Marie de Maupeou, a Lady of Charity admirable for her zeal and her devotion to Saint Vincent. Fouquet’s brothers were Nicolas, Superintendent of Finances, and Louis, Bishop of Agde. His sister, Louise-Agnès, was a nun in the First Monastery of the Visitation. François, named Bishop of Bayonne in 1636, was not consecrated until March 15, 1639. In 1643 he was transferred to the

some. His mother⁷ was still talking to me about this only three or four days ago and urging me to send them. *Mais quoi!* There's no way; we don't have enough of them. A few days ago I was asking one of the Pastors of this city, who has some in his parish, if they were doing well. 'Ah, Monsieur,' he said, 'they're doing so well, by the grace of God, that. . . .'⁸ Well, Messieurs, I wouldn't dare to tell you the good things he said to me about them.

"It's the same in Nantes, where there are some of them, since the people have recognized the simplicity of those good Sisters. In short, they practice mercy, that beautiful virtue of which it's said, 'Mercy is the distinctive feature of God.' We practice it, too, and must do so all our lives: corporal mercy, spiritual mercy, mercy in the rural areas and in the missions by hastening to meet the needs of our neighbor, mercy when we're at home with regard to the retreatants, and with regard to the poor, by teaching them the things necessary for salvation, and in so many other circumstances God

Agde diocese, was appointed Coadjutor of Narbonne on December 18, 1656, and Archbishop of that diocese in 1659. Relegated to Alençon in 1661, he died in exile on October 19, 1673. He brought the Priests of the Mission to Agde and Narbonne and established the Daughters of Charity in the latter town. A very zealous Prelate—too zealous perhaps—he found Saint Vincent's slowness hard to understand, but he greatly admired his virtue. The Saint's death affected him deeply; as soon as he received news of it, he wrote to the priests of Saint-Lazare, "However prepared I may have been for M. Vincent's death, since he was advanced in age, I assure you that I did not hear the news of his passing without surprise and without being moved by great sorrow, humanly speaking, at seeing the Church deprived of a most worthy subject, the Congregation of its very dear Father, and myself of a very charitable friend to whom I am so deeply indebted. I think that, of all those whom his charity caused him to embrace as his children, there is no one to whom he showed greater affection and gave more signs of friendship than to me."

⁷Marie de Maupeou, wife of François Fouquet, Vicomte de Vaux, Master of Requests, and then Councillor of State. Among her eight children were Nicolas, the celebrated Superintendent of Finance; François, Bishop of Narbonne; Louis, Bishop of Agde; and several daughters who entered the Visitation Order, one of whom, Marie-Thérèse, became Superior of the Visitation in Toulouse. Marie de Maupeou was a woman of exceptional piety and immense charity, of whom Saint Vincent said that "if through some mischance the Gospels were lost, their spirit and maxims would be found in the conduct and sentiments of Mme Fouquet." "She makes devotion so attractive," he added, "that she encourages everyone to be devout." (Cf. *Année sainte des religieuses de la Visitation Sainte-Marie* [12 vols., Annecy: Ch. Burdet, 1867-71], vol. I, p. 627.) When she heard that her son Nicolas had fallen into disgrace, she exclaimed, "I thank You, my God. I asked You for the salvation of my son, and this is the way to obtain it." She died in 1681, at the age of ninety-one, mourned by everyone, but especially by the poor, who called her their mother. In the catalogue of the Ladies of Charity, she is listed under the title of Mme Fouquet, the President's wife.

⁸In the margin: "M. Vincent did not want to proceed further with telling the good that those Sisters were doing; that is why he stopped at the word 'that.'"

presents to us. Lastly, we must devote our whole life to doing God's Will everywhere and in all things, marked out for us by the observance of our Rules. You see, brothers, we'll always be doing it every time we don't do our own will; and if we do our own, we won't be doing God's Will.

"Alas, what is our life, so quickly passing? For myself, I'm in my seventy-sixth year; yet, right now all that time seems almost like a dream to me; all those years have gone by. Ah, Messieurs, how fortunate are those who use every moment of their life in the service of God, and offer themselves unconditionally to Him! What consolation do you think they'll get from this at the end of their life? Take Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy in Warsaw, for example; what have they done? Neither cannons, nor fire, nor pillage, nor plague, nor all the other troubles and dangers in which they live caused them to leave there or to abandon their post and the place where Divine Providence had placed them, preferring to risk their lives in that way rather than fail to practice that beautiful virtue of mercy.

"Someone has written me from Rome that, when one of the students from the collège *de Propaganda Fide* went out, he caught the plague, and those who were responsible for health in that city had the collège closed; and because it's the Company that furnishes confessors for that collège, someone was sent to ask the Superior⁹ if he was willing to send a priest who would consent to be enclosed there. The Superior of the Mission proposed the matter to the Com-

⁹Edme Jolly. Born in Doué (Seine-et-Marne) on October 24, 1622, he was acquainted in his youth with the Marquis de Fontenay-Mareuil, the French Ambassador in Rome, who took him to that city. He even entrusted Jolly with a delicate mission in the service of the King, which the young man handled very successfully. Before being admitted to Saint-Lazare on November 13, 1646, he held a post in the Apostolic Datary, an office of the Roman Curia in charge of examining the fitness of candidates for papal benefices and of handling the claims of those with rights to pensions. After his Internal Seminary or novitiate, he returned to Rome, reviewed philosophy, theology, and Canon Law, and was ordained a priest on May 1, 1649. In May 1654 he became Director of the Saint-Lazare Internal Seminary, and in 1655 was appointed Superior of the house in Rome, from where Thomas Berthe had just been recalled by order of the King. Jolly rendered immense service to his Congregation because of the concessions he obtained from the Holy See. After the saint's death he became Assistant to the Superior General and Assistant of the Motherhouse. The General Assembly of 1673 elected him to succeed René Almérás as Superior General. His generalate was one of the most fruitful the Company has ever known. Jolly died in Paris on March 26, 1697. His biography, written by a contemporary, was published with some alterations in vol. III of *Notices*, pp. 387-512.

pany, and the confessor himself, good M. de Martinis, volunteered to be enclosed there, and, in fact, he's there. Now, Messieurs, what's that if not risking one's life for the service of the neighbor, the greatest act of love that can be offered to God, as He himself says in these words, 'There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his friend'?¹⁰ May God be pleased, my dear confreres, to give all of us that disposition!"

158. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

November 11, 1656

At Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent took the opportunity to speak to the Company concerning what a seminarian stated in his repetition about his interior disposition changing, namely, sometimes it was good, sometimes bad, sometimes fervent, then lax and lazy. M. Vincent then spoke, telling him he shouldn't be surprised at that "because," he said, "man is made that way: today he's sad and humiliated, and tomorrow he's joyful and elated. The Son of God himself was willing to leave heaven to put himself in that state for a certain time. At His birth, we see angels and shepherds coming to adore Him, to rejoice together at His birth, and to render Him honor; next, we see Him constrained, so to speak, to flee to a foreign kingdom to avoid Herod's persecution. Once Herod dies, back He comes. He goes off to the temple and appears among the Doctors there as a very intelligent child. From that state of admiration in which He was held by all who saw Him and heard Him speak in that way, He passes to another, for, since the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph had gone home, there He is, all alone in the temple like a poor person bereft of all assistance. At other times, you see Him

¹⁰Cf. Jn 15:13. (NAB)

Conference 158. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 45 v°.

¹*Subheading:* Dispositions at meditation; imitation of Saint Martin; recreation; news of Missioners in Poland and of Luca Arimondo in Genoa; delay in the voyage of Missioners to Madagascar.

performing miracles, raising the dead, making the dumb speak, and healing the sick; then you see Him persecuted by His enemies. You also see Him, radiant with splendor on Mount Tabor, and then, after that, you see Him cruelly treated, mocked, insulted, and scourged. With regard to His Church, we see the same thing: now at peace, then persecuted, etc. Oh no, brothers! We mustn't be surprised at seeing these changes in ourselves; but what we have to do is to thank God equally for one and the other state in which it will please His Divine Majesty that we may be—whether joy and consolation, or sadness and distress—and to love all the states in which God is pleased to place us, whatever they may be.

“Let's ask Our Lord for this grace today through the intercession of Saint Martin,² that great saint whom the entire Church holds in such great veneration; and the same Church has had such esteem for that act of charity he practiced toward a poor man, by cutting his cloak in half to give it to him to cover himself, that it represents him to us on horseback, as a knight, dividing his cloak in two in order to give half of it to that poor man. And, to show His servant how pleased He was with that act of charity, Our Lord himself willed to appear to him that night, wrapped in that half of the cloak. This, my dear confreres, shows us how highly God and the Church, inspired and led by the Holy Spirit, look upon charity practiced toward poor persons. O brothers, how fortunate we are to be in a Company that professes to run to the relief of the neighbor! Charity at home, charity in the country by means of missions, charity toward poor persons; and I might add that, by the grace of God, the Company hasn't failed to seize any opportunity that has presented itself to help poor persons in need. What a consolation for this Little Company, Messieurs, to see that, despite its insignificance, God still wills to make use of it in that way! What a consolation for the same Company to see that it has no sooner sown than it reaps at almost the same time! That's seen in the missions, where the poor people spend two or three days with a piece of bread at the doors of churches in order not to lose the opportunity of going to confession and putting them-

²His feast was being celebrated on that day (November 11).

selves in a good state. In a word, I repeat that we're fortunate to be in a situation where we profess to do the same things Saint Martin did in his diocese, which is to go through the villages preaching, teaching catechism, and instructing the poor people! Let's ask God, Messieurs, through the intercession of that great saint, to give us generosity founded on humility. Yes, let's ask that great saint to obtain for the Company the virtue of generosity, founded on humility; founded on humility, you see, generosity founded on humility.

"Today an opportunity is being presented to the Company to serve persons who are poor.³ With all the affection of my heart, I ask the Company to pray earnestly that Our Lord may be pleased to make His Will known to it on this point."

Next, Brother Alexandre,⁴ the second oldest coadjutor Brother, went on his knees. When M. Vincent asked him what was the matter, in response to his Superior's question he accused himself of having disobeyed the order previously given to the coadjutor Brothers not to get together, by way of recreation, after dinner and supper, saying that he had conversed with a Brother one time for about a quarter of an hour.

In reply, M. Vincent answered in these terms: "*Oh bien*, Brother, God be praised! It's true that this shouldn't be done and that we recommended it before because, since the Brothers work in duties which, in themselves, provide some distraction and don't demand mental exertion, that was supposed to be only for the priests and seminarians, who, after straining their minds during the day at studies, the Office, and preparation for the missions, need some outlet to relax their minds. *Oh bien*, Brothers, please give yourselves to God to adopt the practice of never conversing with one another after meals by way of recreation; instead, each of you should go to your duty. If it's a feast day or a Sunday, when some don't need to go to their duties, they can go to help those in the kitchen or storeroom."

He also recommended to the Company the needs of Poland, saying that the previous evening he had received news from there, and

³The King had in view entrusting the spiritual direction of the General Hospital to the Congregation of the Mission.

⁴Alexandre Veronne.

M. de Fleury,⁵ chaplain of the Queen of Poland, had informed him that the affairs of the King and Queen were going much better, by the grace of God, but he didn't forget to praise Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy, who, as has already been said several times, had not abandoned their parish of Holy Cross in Warsaw, despite the fact that they had been robbed of everything, even their cloaks, and had nothing left. He said also that, in spite of cannons, fire, and plague, none of that could make them leave the post where Divine Providence had placed them, and where they were still continuing to do the best they could in whatever way possible.

He added that M. Lucas,⁶ Priest of the Mission in Genoa, Italy, was making retreat to prepare himself to risk his life in assisting the plague-stricken, in the event that the Mission of Genoa might be asked for a priest for this purpose. He said also that, when the ship destined for Madagascar was just about to depart and set sail on the eve of last All Saints' Day, it was prevented from leaving by the Providence of God because of a sudden change in the wind, which made sailing impossible, and that M. Herbron,⁷ priest of the Company, who was on that ship going to the island, had just told him that it was the reason why their ship was still in port. Furthermore, he said that God had allowed it by the special guidance of His Providence and that, if the wind hadn't suddenly changed as it did, the ship would have sailed. That meant that the packets of letters and documents, so useful and necessary to the Missioners for the missions in that country, wouldn't have been carried by this ship be-

⁵François de Fleury, chaplain to the Queen of Poland. Born in the Langres diocese (Haute-Marne), he secured for himself a canonry in the Verdun diocese. He approved the book, *De la fréquente communion*, and was presented by the Jansenists to Queen Louise-Marie de Gonzague on her departure for Poland to act as her chaplain. His relationship with Saint Vincent and the Missioners sent to that country was always excellent—even cordial—as is evident from the letters of the saint, who had great respect for him. Fleury died in France early in November 1658. Part of his correspondence with Mère Marie-Angélique Arnauld is extant.

⁶Luca Arimondo (Alimondo), born in Cerno, in the Albenga diocese (Italy), on November 25, . . . was ordained a priest on February 20, 1644, entered the Congregation of the Mission in Genoa on March 25, 1650, took his vows on February 25, 1656, and died of the plague in Genoa on November 4, 1656.

⁷François Herbron, born in Alençon (Orne) in November 1617, was ordained a priest on September 22, 1646, entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 20, 1653, and took his vows on January 6, 1656. When the ship on which he was to sail for Madagascar sank, he was assigned to Le Mans.

cause the packet wouldn't have reached Nantes in time to be given to M. Herbron. Instead, the delay provided the Daughters of Charity of Nantes with the means of seeing that the packet was delivered to the departing Missioners.

159 - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

November 12, 1656

At Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent said, among other things, that “M. Le Vacher the elder,² a priest of the Company in Tunis with the Consul,³ was at peace and tranquil at the moment, not only with regard to the Turks but also with the English Consul and the French merchants.” He asked the Company to thank God for this, but said that things weren't the same for Algiers because, “since Brother Barreau⁴ has been there as Consul, he's been living in a state of almost continuous—or at least very frequent—persecution in the form of the *avarias*⁵ and bad treatment received from the Turks, and the ingratitude of some Christians, for whom he had stood surety, so much so that today he's deeply in debt from all that. He informed me also that he's still being threatened at present by an *avania* because a Frenchman mistreated some Jews, and for that reason the Turks are saying the French Consul is responsible, not taking into consideration that the faults are personal.”

M. Vincent then exclaimed, saying, “God grant, my dear confreres, that all those who present themselves to join the Company will come with the thought of martyrdom, desiring to suffer martyrdom in it and to devote themselves entirely to the service of God, whether in far off lands or here, wherever it may please God to

Conference 159. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 47.

¹*Subheading*: News of Barbary Missioners; readiness to suffer anything for the glory of God.

²Jean Le Vacher.

³Martin Husson.

⁴Jean Barreau.

⁵Affronts.

make use of the poor Little Company! Yes, with the thought of martyrdom. How often we should ask Our Lord for that grace and the disposition to be ready to risk our lives for His glory and the salvation of the neighbor, each and every one of us—Brothers, seminarians, priests—in a word, the entire Company! Alas, Messieurs, is there anything more reasonable than to give our lives for Him who has given His life so generously for each and every one of us? And if Our Lord loves us to the point of dying for us, why should we not desire to have this same disposition with regard to Him and to put it into effect, if the occasion were to present itself? We see that so many Popes were martyred, one after the other; we count thirty-five of them in a row. Isn't it strange to see merchants, who, for a little profit, cross the seas and expose themselves to I don't know how many dangers? Last Sunday I was with one of them, who came to see me and told me someone had suggested that he go to the Indies, and he had made up his mind to go, in the hope of making some profit there. I asked him if there were any great dangers in this; he said yes, there were, but he knew a certain person who had returned from there, and another had, in fact, remained there. So I asked myself, 'If that person, for a little profit, to bring back a certain stone, risks so many dangers to do this, with what greater reason should we do it to bring the precious stone of the Gospel to that place!' ”

160. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

November 15, 1656

M. Vincent signaled the Company to come closer to him, as if for the usual Repetition of Prayer, and said, “Please come closer, not for Repetition of Prayer—we had that exercise yesterday and the day before, the feast of Saint Martin—but for me to share with you a

Conference 160. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 47 v^o.

¹*Subheading:* Lessons from the wreck of the ship on which François Herbron, Claude Boussordec, and Bro. Christophe Delauney were to sail to Madagascar.

grace that God, in His infinite goodness, has just given to some members of the Company, so that we can thank Him for it and, on the other hand, so I can tell you about the disaster that befell some other people. Last evening I received a letter written to me by M. Boussordec,² informing me that the ship that was to set sail for Madagascar, and on which they were supposed to travel, had sunk; and this is how it happened. You know how fierce the wind was the day after last All Saints' Day; it was so strong that it even broke one of the windows in this building and caused part of the chimney of the new building³ here to fall. That letter states that the ship, as I was telling you these past few days, was ready to leave but was prevented from doing so by a sudden change in the wind.

"On the feast of All Saints, Messrs. Herbron and Boussordec said Mass on the ship, which was in the harbor; but they had a hard time doing so because of the high wind that day.

"The next day, All Souls' Day, the storm grew worse; and, to avoid the danger, they brought the ship down opposite Saint-Nazaire in the wide river of Nantes. Once they were there, those men, who really wanted to celebrate Mass that day, thinking perhaps of their friends and relations who might be in purgatory and crying out, *Miseremini mei, saltem vos amici mei*,⁴ for that reason, together with their desire to celebrate Mass that day and the need M. Herbron had of going ashore, as the letter says; be that as it may, for that reason, I repeat, they decided to go ashore, and they left to say Mass at Saint-Nazaire, about a quarter of a league away. So off they went. They said their Mass at Saint-Nazaire, then turned around to get back on the ship with the captain, who had also gone ashore. When they got to the bank of the great river of Nantes, where the ship was, they couldn't find anyone

²Charles Boussordec, born in Châtaudren (Côtes-du-Nord), was a Pastor in the Tréguier diocese before entering the Congregation of the Mission on August 21, 1654, at forty-five years of age. He took his vows in Luçon, in the presence of M. Berthe, and was Director of the Annecy Seminary (1660-62). On March 31, 1665, en route to Madagascar, Boussordec got into a longboat headed for shore off the coast of Cape Verde and drowned trying to save some of the other passengers when the overloaded boat capsized. His body was recovered on April 2. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 341-47.)

³In 1645 the small infirmary on the Saint-Lazare property was renovated to accommodate the ordinands; Saint Vincent referred to it as "the new building".

⁴*Pity me, at least you my friends.* Cf. Jb 19:21. (NAB)

willing to take them out to the ship because the storm was so bad that the sailors didn't dare to risk their lives in such weather. The result was that they had to remain on land, unable to go aboard. Seeing all that, and since the storm kept up all day long, they went back and slept in Saint-Nazaire.

"Now, about eleven o'clock that night, the storm intensified and swept the ship on to a sandbank, where it was dashed to pieces. God, however, gave the inspiration and thought to some of the men on the ship to construct a sort of raft made of a few planks they bound together. How did they do it? I still don't know; but sixteen or seventeen persons got on it at the mercy of the sea and the mercy of God. Among those sixteen or seventeen was our poor Bro. Christophe Delaunay.⁵ Taking his crucifix in hand, he began to encourage his companions. 'Courage!' he said to them, 'Let's have great faith and confidence in God; let's hope in Our Lord, and He will get us out of this danger.' And he began to spread out his cloak to serve as a sail. I don't know if the others had any; be that as it may, he spread his out and perhaps gave one corner to one of the men and another to another. In this way, they reached land, since God, with His goodness and special protection, saved them from the danger in which they were; and all of them reached the shore alive—except for one who died of cold and from the fright he experienced in this danger.⁶

"What shall we say about this, my dear confreres? Nothing but that the ways of God are incomprehensible and hidden from the eyes of humans, who can't understand them. *Quoi*, Lord! It seems that You want to establish Your empire in those far-off lands and in

⁵Christophe Delaunay, born in Haute-Chapelle (Orne), entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother on October 4, 1653, at nineteen years of age, took his vows in Luçon on January 6, 1656, and died in 1658. In VI, 149-50, we see the courage and spirit of faith with which he acted when the ship that was to take him to Madagascar was wrecked.⁵Christophe Delaunay, born in Haute-Chapelle (Orne), entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother on October 4, 1653, at nineteen years of age, took his vows in Luçon on January 6, 1656, and died in 1658. In VI, 149-50, we see the courage and spirit of faith with which he acted when the ship that was to take him to Madagascar was wrecked.

⁶*In the margin*: "Note: They were said to have sailed a good two leagues in this condition before reaching land and saving themselves. Note also that this was reported as something marvelous in the *Gazette de France*."

the souls of those poor infidels, and yet You allow what apparently contributed to its being destroyed and perishing in port!”

Then, addressing the Company, he went on to say, “No, Messieurs, no, Brothers, don’t let that surprise you, or that those to whom His Divine Majesty has given the desire to go to those countries aren’t discouraged by this misfortune, because God’s ways are so hidden from us that we don’t see them. And that doesn’t mean He doesn’t will the conversion of those poor persons beyond the seas. Even though He has permitted that disaster, He’s doing it for reasons of which we’re unaware. Perhaps certain sins were being committed on that ship, which God was unwilling to tolerate any longer. About two or three weeks ago, M. Herbron informed me that the disturbances were so great, and the swearing, blasphemy, and abuses taking place there were so horrible, that it was dreadful. Several men on board had been taken by force to be transported abroad. Well, what do we know about the reason for that accident? This or that person shouldn’t be blamed for it; what we have to do is to adore the ways of God.

“Alas! Just because things happened that way, would it be reasonable that those to whom God had given the desire to go beyond the seas should act like cowards now because one ship has sunk! No, I don’t want to think there are men like that in the Company. You see, great plans are always thwarted by various circumstances and difficulties that never fail to arise, since God permits this. *Mais quoi donc!* Doesn’t God want the Company to continue the work He began? Oh yes, Messieurs, He does want the Company to continue it; but why, then, does He seem to be destroying in this way what can contribute to it? No, no, don’t think that. On the contrary, wasn’t I telling you yesterday, in speaking about the Church, how so many Popes—even up to thirty-five—were martyred one after the other? Why is that, if not to show that what God had once decided had to be accomplished and that His Church would survive despite all calamities, and despite all persecutions, which were so fierce that Christians didn’t dare to appear on the land but were hidden in caves, some here, some there? In view of that, it seemed like God didn’t want His Church to survive, and yet it’s quite the contrary,

for the blood of so many martyrs who were killed were so many seeds to serve to strengthen the Church.

“God, you see, never changes what He has once decided, no matter what we think may happen to the contrary; and we see this with Abraham.⁷ God had promised Abraham that He would multiply his seed like the stars in the heavens. Abraham had only one son; nevertheless, God ordered him to sacrifice him, to cut off the head of the one from whose seed the mother of His own Son was to be born. Didn’t Abraham have good reason to say, ‘*Eh quoi*, Lord! You promised that my seed would be multiplied like the stars in the sky; yet You know I have only one Son, and You order me to sacrifice him!’ Still, Abraham hopes against all hope and prepares to sacrifice his son. And God, as I just told you, who never changes His mind regarding the plans He has once determined, blocks the blow.

“In the same way, my dear confreres, God wills to test our faith, our hope, and our zeal by the accident that just occurred. God wills to chastise the whole world; He sends the universal flood to chastise the horrible sins that were being committed; nevertheless, what does He do? He gives Noah the idea of building an ark, and it took Noah one hundred years to do it. Why do you think God willed that it take so long to build that ark if not to see if the world would be converted, if it would do penance, and if it would learn from what Noah was saying to them from the window of his ark, crying out at the top of his lungs, according to some authors, ‘Do penance, ask God’s forgiveness.’ That shows us again that, although God may have seemed to want everyone to be drowned in the waters, His plan, however, was something else, since He willed that Noah and his whole family be exempt from shipwreck, in order to repopulate the world, and so that what He had determined from all eternity concerning the birth of His Son might be accomplished.

“But don’t we also see that the Eternal Father, having sent His Son on earth to be the light of the world, nevertheless, had Him appear only as a little boy, like one of those poor little ones you see coming to this door? *Eh quoi!* Eternal Father, You have sent Your

⁷Cf. Gn 22:1-19. (NAB)

Son to enlighten and teach everyone, and yet He appears to us nothing less than that! But wait a little, and you'll see God's plan; and because He determined not to allow the world to be lost and had compassion on it, that same Son will give His life for us.

"But if, on the other hand, my dear confreres, we consider the grace He granted those members of the Company by rescuing them from that shipwreck, must you not agree that God keeps the poor, insignificant Little Company under His special protection? And that, Messieurs, is what should encourage us more and more to give ourselves to His Divine Majesty in the best way we can to perfect His great work; for, alas, who was thinking about Madagascar? *Quoi!* Would we really have had the temerity to want to undertake that great work on our own, or even to think that God would have turned to the poorest, most insignificant Company in His Church! No, Messieurs, no, Brothers, we weren't thinking about that; and we never asked to go to Madagascar; it was the Papal Nuncio who mentioned it to us first and asked us to be good enough to supply a few priests of the Company to be sent there. This was in response to the request made to him by some of those gentlemen and merchants who were sending people there, and those gentlemen felt they could do no better than to go to see the Papal Nuncio in order to get the kind of priests they needed in that country. He thought of us, and that's how we came to send Messrs. Nacquart and Gondrée there.

"But don't you admire the power of the Spirit of God in that young man, our good Bro. Christophe, who's a timid, humble, gentle boy? Yes, he's the most humble, gentle young man I know, and there he was, crucifix in hand, crying out to his companions to encourage them, 'Courage! Let's hope in the goodness and mercy of God, and He will rescue us from this danger!' I'll tell you in passing, Brothers, that this should teach you never to be without a crucifix. He's not the one who did that, Brothers; it was God alone, acting through him, who did it. But, after all, even if they should have died at the head of all those who were there, there's reason to believe they would have been very fortunate to die with the intention of serving God at the head of their flock; for all those people had been entrusted to their spiritual care for the entire voyage.

“That made me recall what was told to me several times about fifteen or eighteen years ago by the father of Mlle Poulailhon,⁸ M. Lumague, who was staying in Tivoli in Lombardy, where his wife died, that when God wanted to destroy that town, which was situated on the side of a mountain, it happened some time previously that a great earthquake took place, causing that mountain to tremble and uprooting trees. That made certain people, including a good local Pastor, a very learned and upright man, think God was angered against that town because of the disturbances or sins being committed there. He had the bell rung to summon the parishioners, who heard this bell and came to church. That good Pastor went up into the pulpit, preached to them, and urged them to be converted and to ask God’s forgiveness. Among those present at that sermon was an upright man to whom God gave the idea, during the sermon, to leave the town and to withdraw to avoid the danger with which it was being threatened. He left, went back home, gathered up his wife and children in haste, and along with them everything that was most precious to them; they left and went away. When that man was a short distance from the town, he recalled that he had forgotten to lock his shop. He told his little boy, whom he had with him, ‘Listen, go back and lock my shop; I forgot to close it up.’ The boy returned, and in an instant the town was in ruins; everything was turned upside down.

“This, my dear confreres, shows us how God takes care of us, and, if He punishes us, it’s only as a last resort and after having urged us by various means to be converted to Him. We see how He

⁸Mlle de Pollalion (Saint Vincent always wrote “Poulailhon”), Marie de Lumague, was the widow of François de Pollalion, a gentleman-in-ordinary of Louis XIII’s household. She was among those devout widows whom Saint Vincent put to work in the apostolate. Born in Paris on November 29, 1599, married at the age of eighteen and widowed shortly after, she took a vow of celibacy and placed herself under the saint’s direction. Together with Saint Louise and other charitable Ladies, she visited the Charities, instructed little girls, and took alms to the poor. She especially wanted to gather together and reform delinquent girls; for this purpose she founded the Daughters of Providence. Saint Vincent worked on the Rules of this Institute, procured funds and good directors for it, and obtained its approval by the King and the Archbishop of Paris. Mlle de Pollalion died on September 4, 1657. (Cf. Hyacinthe Collin, *Vie de la Vénérable Servante de Dieu Marie Lumague, veuve de M. Pollalion* [Paris: Cl. J. B. Hérisant fils, 1744]; Abbé L. Teillet, *Histoire de l’Union chrétienne de Fontenay-le-Comte* [Fontenay-le-Comte: L. P. Gouraud, 1898].)

has special care for those who serve Him, as you see that He did for that man whom He ordered to leave town, and as he had formerly done for Lot, when He willed to destroy the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁹

“*Or sus*, I’d better finish. I think we should do two things: first, thank God for the protection He gave to our Missioners, as well as to the others whom He rescued from that danger; and for that purpose, I ask all the priests who have no special obligation, to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for that intention today.

“The other thing I think we should do is to say a Requiem High Mass for the repose of the souls of those one hundred twenty or so persons who drowned, including the Captain’s Lieutenant and another distinguished person. With the exception of the sixteen I mentioned and the eighteen who were on land, everyone else died. That Mass should be said tomorrow, God willing. We’re even more obligated to do this because it seemed that God had placed them under the guidance of the priests of the Company, who were supposed to act as their Pastors for the entire voyage and once they had reached that place. I think it will be well to do it that way, with the Mass of thanksgiving first.”¹⁰

161. - DUTY OF CATECHIZING PERSONS WHO ARE POOR

November 17, 1656

There were three points to the conference. The first was to see if we noticed that the Company had grown lax in the practice it has

⁹Cf. Gn 19:1-29. (NAB)

¹⁰*In a marginal note:* I also heard from someone in the Company that thirty-four persons were saved from this danger; namely, sixteen on the rafts or planks mentioned above, among them Bro. Christophe, and eighteen who were on land, including Messrs. Herbron and Boussordec, Priests of the Mission, together with the ship’s Captain, and that all the rest, one hundred thirty in number, went down with the ship.

Conference 161. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 51.

had from the beginning of its institution of teaching catechism to poor persons, children, and other people we meet while traveling, at the house, or on the missions. The second presented the great benefits this exercise of teaching catechism brought about. The third, the means of reviving this exercise in the event that it had fallen into disuse.

Speaking on this topic after several of the oldest men in the Company, both Coadjutor Brothers and priests, M. Vincent said, “I’m going to speak like my poor confreres; at present I really don’t know where we are in this because, if I go into the city and arrive at some house, I have to go up to my room or into the reception room; so you, Messieurs, who go on mission and to the rural areas, you see this better than I do right now. I do know well, however, what was done at the beginning of the Company, and that it was exact about the practice of letting no opportunity pass to instruct a poor person, which the men did if they saw that the person needed it; priests, seminarians, and our Coadjutor Brothers all did this, as they came and went. If they met some poor person—a boy or some good man—they’d speak to him to see if he knew the Mysteries necessary for salvation; and if they noted that he didn’t, they’d teach them to him. I don’t know if we’re still as careful today to observe this holy practice; I’m talking about the men who go into the rural areas and stay at inns along the way. If that’s the case, fine! They should thank God for it and ask Him for perseverance for the same Company; if not—and if there has been any relaxation in this—they should ask for the grace to correct themselves.

“As for the second point, the benefits that come from putting this holy custom in practice are very great; whereas, on the contrary, those who are unfaithful to it will be in danger of committing great evils. I say great evils because, as the man who already spoke said so well, a person can be killed in two ways: either by striking him and giving him the death blow, or by not giving him what can sustain his life. So, you can understand that it’s a serious fault if you see that the neighbor hasn’t been instructed in the Mysteries necessary for salvation, and you don’t teach them to him when you can. And what should urge us even more to do that is what Saint Augustine,

Saint Thomas,¹ and Saint Athanasius say, namely, that those who don't know explicitly the Mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation won't be saved. That's their thinking. I'm well aware that there are other theologians who aren't so strict and who hold the opposite because, they say, it's very painful to see that a poor man, for example, who has lived a good life, may be damned because he didn't find someone to teach him those Mysteries. Now, in this uncertainty, my dear confreres, it will always be for us a great charity if we instruct those poor people, whoever they may be; and we mustn't lose any opportunity to do so, if it can be done.

“By the grace of God, I know some members of the Company who almost never fail in this, unless they're prevented by something. I don't know how well the men at the door carry this out; I don't think it's done as well as formerly; I'm afraid our two Brothers at the door are negligent about this. Perhaps it's because they're both new and don't know how we're accustomed to act. I'm not sure if it's done in the farmyard and if the Brother who's there is very careful to see whether our workers are sufficiently instructed, or if he really needs to speak to them privately sometime regarding that. In this he will imitate Our Lord when He went to sit on that stone that was near the well, and, once He was there, began to instruct that woman by asking her for some water. ‘Woman, give me some water,’ He said to her.² So, he [the Brother] can ask one, then the other, ‘*Eh bien!* How are your horses getting along? How's this? How's that? How are you doing?’ beginning in this way with something similar and then moving on to our plan. The Brothers in the garden, the shoemaker's shop, or the tailor's can do likewise, and the same for the others so that there'll be no one here in this house who's not sufficiently instructed in all the things necessary to be saved. Sometimes they can talk with them about how to make a good confession and the conditions for confession, sometimes about some other topic they may find helpful and necessary.

¹In a letter written to François du Coudray in September 1631, Saint Vincent espoused this opinion as Saint Thomas expressed it (cf. I, 119).

²Cf. Jn 4:7-38. (NAB)

“ ‘Those who teach others the things helpful and necessary for their salvation,’ says Holy Scripture, ‘will shine like stars in eternal life.’³ And that’s another great benefit for those who teach the way of their salvation to others, who, for lack of that, might not perhaps be saved.

“The Brothers are not to teach or catechize in church; no, that’s inadvisable; outside of that, however, they should do it at every opportunity.

“*Or sus*, I have to stop; the clock is striking. I’m very guilty on this point, having so often given the Company reason to be bored, going on too long after the bell has rung. People have had the charity to remind me of this fault, wretch that I am; that’s why I most humbly ask pardon of God and of the whole Company for the mortification and bad example I’ve given in this and for letting so many opportunities go by without having instructed so many persons—sometimes poor people—who have come to our room; and yet, wretch that I am, I haven’t done it.”

Note that at this same conference M. Vincent reproved a Coadjutor Brother for having used the term “our Messieurs,” in speaking of the Priests of the Mission of Annecy, where he had been living, and he told him not to use the term “our Messieurs” any longer. Two days later, at Repetition of Prayer, he asked the Company to pray for M. Lucas,⁴ a priest of the Company living in Genoa, referring to him as “our brother Lucas.”

³Cf. Dn 12:3. (NAB)

⁴Luca Alimondo.

162. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

November 19, 1656

Our Most Honored and blessed Father M. Vincent began by recommending to our prayers the Missioners in Rome, and then those in Genoa because an increase in the plague was reported. He also asked us to pray for our Most Holy Father the Pope, the Sacred College of Cardinals, and Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy. He said that the first, M. Desdames, caught the plague but was cured of it, by the grace of God, for which I ask the Company to thank God. “This gives you just a small idea of God’s grace and how He cares for His servants. O my dear confreres, believe me, there’s nothing like being faithful to God and persevering in good once we have undertaken to do it. ‘Because you’ve been faithful in small things, I will place you over many,’ God says.² So then, let’s be faithful, faithful in the practice of our Rules, faithful in the observance of the holy customs of the Company, faithful in the practice of the good works we’ve undertaken, in a word, faithful in all things.

“And what will come of all that, my dear confreres? The result will be that we’ll advance in virtue day by day, like that tiny mustard seed, which, even though very small, still becomes a large tree in the course of time. So, I’m hoping that, if the Company is truly faithful to practice exactly its Rules and all the ministries that concern it, it will gradually advance in God’s good graces; and, if today, for example, someone practices one degree of an act of virtue, tomorrow he will practice it to the second, then the third degree of perfection, and that’s how we grow little by little. Today a Brother, a seminarian, or a priest will have practiced up to two degrees of a certain act of humility, for example; if he’s faithful to God, the next day he’ll practice three or four degrees of it, going higher in this

Conference 162. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 52.

¹*Subheading:* Fidelity to the Rules and customs assures spiritual progress; negligence paves the way for the ruin of individuals and Communities; services rendered by the Marseilles house to the Saint-Victor novices.

²Cf. Mt 25:21. (NAB)

way, according as he works steadily at the practice of that virtue, with the grace of God, without which we can do nothing.

“Haven’t we seen this in our poor little Brother? We’ve watched virtue grow in him, starting with almost nothing.³ And if you pay close attention, you’ll notice the same thing in many men in the Company. As for me, I must confess that there are certain persons in the Company whom I never see without reflecting on myself and becoming ashamed. In the life of Saint Anthony we see that respect for all creatures served to encourage him in the service of God. If we consider many members of the Company, brothers, we’ll see humility in one, gentleness in another, charity toward the neighbor in this one, the love of God in that one, regularity and exactness in that other one, and patience and exact obedience in another. And who does all that? God. God is the one, my dear confreres, who acts in those persons—more in some, less in others, according as the power of the Spirit of the same God is communicated to them. I’m not talking about talents here, such as in preaching, for example, which is not something for us but for others, and which serves very often only to ruin a man and excite vanity; but I’m speaking of the virtues that make us more pleasing to God; and that the close attention we’ll pay to the virtues we see in our confreres will have an even greater effect on us, since we see that they’re people like ourselves, whom we see with our own eyes and with whom we’re living; and that often has a greater effect on certain persons than reflecting on the virtues of many saints who have died and whom we no longer see, or never saw at all. Ah, when I think about some members of the Company who, for one, two, six, eight, or ten years have been suffering, one from severe pain, another from a lingering illness, and are accepting this with perfect patience and in conformity with God’s good pleasure, and that as soon as I have a slight pain in my feet or my knees, I cry out, I complain; you can well imagine, I say, that those examples make me ashamed to see myself so weak as not to be able to suffer the slightest pain!

³*Note of the copyist:* I think he was talking about Bro. Christophe Delauney.

“O my dear confreres, what power good example and those exemplary men in a Company have, and what good they do in it! On the contrary, the man who begins to grow lax either in the practice of virtue or the observance of the Rules, *O Dieu*, what danger he’s in of doing a lot of harm, if he’s not rescued as soon as possible from that state! And, as I’ve just said to you, just as those who are faithful make progress from day to day, those, on the contrary, who begin to grow lax, drop from one degree to the other and, in the end, they fall because they can’t hold on any longer. They’re bound to fall; they’re like a man who has taken one false step: you see him bending over from the weight of his body, making him unable to stand upright; he’s bound to fall. *Or sus*, God be praised! God be ever praised and glorified! Oh yes, brothers, once God conceives an affection for a soul, regardless of what it may do, He bears with it. Haven’t you ever seen a father who has a child whom he loves dearly? He lets that little one do whatever he likes to him, even sometimes telling him, ‘Bite me, my child.’ How does that happen? It’s because he loves that little child. God acts the same way with regard to us, brothers.

“I’ve heard from Marseilles that they’ve begun by teaching those Saint-Victor novices how to pray the breviary and to perform the ceremonies, which they’ve never done before. Now, think about that a little and consider how far that great Order has fallen today. I say ‘great Order;’ a large number of Cardinals and Prelates have come from it—even Popes; an Order that lived in such a holy way in the beginning! Nevertheless, you see the state to which it’s now reduced. That’s what also happened to other Orders and Communities in the Church of God, which have grown lax in their original regular observances and in the practice of virtue, and the same will happen to the Companies that grow lax.

“In a word, what will happen is exactly what has happened to the chateau of Ventadour, situated on Mount. . . .⁴ Formerly it was seen to be inhabited by virtuous, God-fearing persons of quality; and who do you think inhabits it today? Toads, crows, owls, and

⁴The name is omitted in the manuscript. The ruins of this ancient château can still be seen in the commune of Moustier-Ventadour (Corrèze).

other ugly animals. The whole roof has caved in; only the walls remain. In the same way, houses that allow themselves to grow lax in virtue find themselves in no time inhabited by people filled with vices, passions, and sins. Well, they're to be pitied. *Or sus*, courage then, Messieurs, courage, Brothers! Let's give ourselves sincerely to God, let's work hard to acquire virtue, particularly humility—yes, humility; let's earnestly ask God to be pleased to give this virtue to the Little Company of the Mission. Humility—yes, humility—I repeat, humility!"

163. - MARTYRDOM OF PEDRO BORGUÑY IN ALGIERS

(Now 143a.)

164. - LOVE FOR THE POOR

January 1657

"God loves the poor, consequently, He loves those who love the poor; for, when we truly love someone, we have an affection for his friends and for his servants. Now, the Little Company of the Mission strives to devote itself ardently to serve persons who are poor, the well-beloved of God; in this way, we have good reason to hope that, for love of them, God will love us. Come then, my dear confreres, let's devote ourselves with renewed love to serve persons who are poor, and even to seek out those who are the poorest and most abandoned; let's acknowledge before God that they're our lords and masters and that we're unworthy of rendering them our little services."

165. - HUMILITY

[April or May 1657]¹

“Those priests who meet here² chose as the topic of their discussion last Tuesday what each one had noted about the virtues of the late Abbé Olier, who was a member of their Company; among other things mentioned, one of the most significant was that this great servant of God usually tended to belittle himself in his words, and that, among all the virtues, he strove particularly to practice humility. Now, while they were speaking, I was contemplating the portraits of those holy persons that are in our hall, and I said to myself, ‘Lord, my God, if we could really fathom the Christian truths as deeply as they did and conform ourselves to that knowledge, how differently we’d act from the way we do!’ For example, dwelling on the portrait of the blessed Bishop of Geneva, I thought that, if we looked at the things of the world with the same eye that he did, if we spoke about them with the same sentiments with which he did, and if our ears were open only to the eternal truths—as mine are not—vanity would have no chance to occupy our senses and our minds.

“Above all, Messieurs, if we really study that beautiful portrait we have before our eyes, that admirable model of humility Our Lord Jesus Christ, could it ever happen that we might allow any

Conference 165. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, sect. II, 223, excerpt.

¹Jean-Jacques Olier died on April 2, 1657, prompting Coste to assign that date for this conference.

Abbé Olier, the celebrated founder of Saint-Sulpice Seminary, was born in Paris on September 20, 1608. After a few hesitations, which Saint Vincent succeeded in dissipating, he decided to become a priest and was ordained on May 21, 1633. The first years of his priesthood were dedicated to giving missions with the priests of Saint-Lazare, whom he edified by his zeal and humility. Saint Vincent calls him “a man given over to the grace of God and completely apostolic.” In 1635, for reasons still unexplained, Olier changed from the direction of Saint Vincent, his confessor for three years, to that of Fr. de Condren. This was not a desertion—far from it. In 1649 he wrote, “For extraordinary affairs, we do not fail to see M. Vincent, and for ordinary matters, all our brothers assembled.” Only after consulting the saint did he open the Vaugirard Seminary and accept the pastorate of Saint-Sulpice. “M. Vincent is our father,” he often used to say to his seminarians. Olier died on April 2, 1657, assisted by his holy friend, who consoled the priests of Saint-Sulpice in their sorrow. We still have an excerpt from the address to them on this occasion, which has been attributed to Saint Vincent (cf. **XIIIa**, 184).

²The members of the Tuesday Conferences.

good opinion of ourselves to enter our mind, seeing ourselves so far removed from His exceeding self-abasement? Would we be so rash as to prefer ourselves to others, seeing that He was valued less than a murderer? Would we have any fear of being recognized as wretched men, seeing the Innocent One treated as a lawbreaker and dying between two criminals as the most guilty one? Let's ask God to preserve us from this blindness, Messieurs; let's ask Him for the grace always to seek lowly places; let's confess before Him and before men that of ourselves we're nothing but sin, ignorance, and malice; let's hope that people will believe this, say it, and despise us for it. Lastly, let's lose no opportunity for self-annihilation through this holy virtue.

"It's not sufficient, however, to be zealous about that and to be determined to do it, as many are; we must do violence to ourselves in order to attain the practice of acts; and we don't do that enough."

166. - THE VIRTUES OF BROTHER JOURDAIN¹

April 27, 1657

The conference was held on the death of our late Brother Jean Jourdain, the first and oldest Brother of the Company, which occurred on April 25, feast of Saint Mark, around six in the evening. After four of our coadjutor Brothers had spoken, M. Vincent said, "God be praised for all that has just been said! Our good deceased Bro. Jourdain came from parents who lived in a country village ten to twelve leagues from here. He first worked as a teacher in his own region, where he taught children as soon as he was capable of doing so. Then he came to Paris, where he found the means of becoming part

Conference 166. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 53 v°.

¹Jean Jourdain, born in Gallius-la-Queue in 1587, entered the Congregation of the Mission on February 13, 1627. He and Saint Vincent became acquainted when Jourdain was equerry and majordomo at the Gondi home and Saint Vincent was chaplain there. Of a lively temperament, Bro. Jean was inclined to give admonitions at every turn, but he quickly repented, and those whom he had offended saw him on his knees before them a moment later. He died April 25, 1657. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. I, pp. 373-75.)

of the household of the late Marquise de Maignelay. He filled two offices there: one was as an equerry, whose role was to accompany her, and the other was as majordomo. This was the period when Mme de Maignelay was living in splendid style. Next, he went to work for a good, very wealthy priest, who had been ordained out of pure piety, and who lived close to Notre-Dame; I don't know, however, if this was before or after he became part of Mme de Maignelay's household. Whichever the case, when I first met him a good forty years ago, he was with the Marquise, and I recall that both of us were nearly the same age. After that, he asked to be admitted into the Company. That was about three or four years after the Company had come together and made the commitment to live in Community. Following his admission, he was placed in the kitchen; then he used to be taken on the missions. Afterward he was put in charge of the storeroom, and it was his duty to purchase all that was needed; so, he served in all the duties suitable for coadjutor Brothers.

"He was a little hasty and hotheaded; but, as has been said so well, he made up for that by asking pardon of those whom he had offended by losing his temper. He embraced them with great tenderness of heart, for he was a man who was easily moved. Since I sometimes reproved him for his hastiness and for taking it upon himself at times to reprove and correct others—something he couldn't do without a certain bitterness or did it at the wrong time—I occasionally gave him another penance and even went so far at times as to forbid him ever to admonish or correct anyone on his own initiative. He accepted this well, but fell easily into the same faults; however, he took the admonitions given him very well. Sometimes He would come to me privately and say, '*Eh bien, Monsieur, for the love of God bear with me, please bear with me!*' "

Here M. Vincent exclaimed and said, speaking of himself, "Alas, miserable man that I am, I used to reprove him, I who have as much or more reason than he to be corrected! *Or sus*, may God be pleased to have mercy on me! Despite all that, God still gave him the grace to persevere to the end in the Company.

"His chief virtue, as has already been mentioned, was great cordiality with the members of the Company, embracing those he'd meet.

When I went to see him on the day he died, he said to me, '*Eh bien, Monsieur, let me embrace you for the last time!*' We've been told about his bad leg, which gave him good reason to practice patience, so much so that he suffered to the end of his life. In short, Messieurs, the end crowns the work, and he's happy for having been in some way like Our Lord Jesus Christ, who finished His life by suffering for the whole world on the tree of the Cross! Oh no, my dear confreres, we shouldn't be surprised if we sometimes see failings in certain persons, because God permits this for reasons of which we're unaware.

"But what am I saying? God makes use even of sin for the justification of a person; yes, sins enter into the order of our predestination, and God draws from them on our part acts of penance and humility—humility for them, yes, Messieurs, humility, which is the characteristic virtue of His Son Our Lord Jesus Christ. Tell me, don't roses bear thorns, for instance? And there are never any roses without thorns. The faults God permits in this way in certain persons—more in some, less in others—serve as ashes to conceal the virtues found in those persons, and cause them, by acknowledging their faults, to maintain themselves in a state of humility and self-abjection. Is there anyone who isn't subject to a few faults and failings, since even the saints themselves were, and no one but the Son of God and the Blessed Virgin His Mother were exempt from them? The Apostles had been taught in the school of Jesus Christ from His own lips; yet you know what sprang up among them—little rivalries, failures in faith—so that even at the very moment the Son of God ascended into heaven He reproached them for their incredulity. I know a holy man who works wonders; he used to be so tempted by impurity that, when he had to go to the country for a few days, he'd go to his director, and say to him, 'Father, I feel so horribly plagued by shameful temptations that I don't know if I'll be pure when I return; I'm very much afraid I won't be.' And yet God tolerated this in a person He wanted to make a saint and, because God wanted this, and he was a man who was fond of his own ease and comfort and acted a little haughty—things far removed from what God was asking of him—He allowed him to fall into humiliating faults, causing him to repent of this.

“One day, when I was speaking with the Jesuit, Father. . . , (he was also there), we happened to be talking about someone who, no matter in what place or company she was, defended the honor of everyone, including all those of whom others tried to speak ill. Yet, she was very quick and easily angered; still, as soon as she saw that she had been hasty, she humbled herself and threw herself at the feet of the members of her household, her chambermaids, and even her servant girls. And as holy as was Saint Paula, she was, nevertheless, very hasty and had some imperfections, even going so far as to find fault with Saint Jerome himself. One day, Saint Jerome, thinking she deserved to be reprimanded (for her excessive acts of mortification), but not daring to do it himself, asked a Bishop to do it. So, that good Bishop began to try to reprove the saint, but she, without waiting for him to finish, said to him in an outburst of anger, ‘It was Jerome who told you that; it was Jerome who told you that!’ Yet, this is a saint—a great saint—who was subject to such failings, so true is it that no one is exempt from imperfections, for God permits all that to humble us and to make us practice acts of virtue. In this person He permits anger; in another, greed; in yet another, impurity; but, with the help of God, they get over it.

“As a matter of fact, what were all of us like, each and every one of us, before we came here? How did we live? Alas! I, wretched man, can speak only for myself, a scandal to everyone, not only to you; in any case, each of us knows what kind of life we used to lead; now, however, by the mercy of God, we’re no longer in that state; we got over it. Not indeed that some little fault doesn’t crop up from time to time, but that’s nothing in comparison with what used to happen.

“ ‘But, Monsieur,’ you’ll say to me, ‘I’m always slipping; and this leads me to fear very much that I don’t love God, for, if I loved Him, I wouldn’t relapse so often.’ You fall again; *eh bien*, you must get up at once and humble yourself profoundly! You say you don’t love God? Tell me, don’t you want to love Him? ‘Yes, I do, Monsieur.’ Then you do love Him, says Saint Augustine, for we desire only what we love. But what you should fear are sins of the intellect, I mean sins of the understanding because we seldom and almost

never conquer them; they're the most dangerous sins, as you'll see from what I'm about to tell you.

"I know two people² who lived for a rather long time like saints and gave abundant alms to the poor. They've gone over to some of those new opinions of the day, and their poor minds and brains are so attached to them that, so far, no way has been found to get them to break away from them, no matter what reasons have been put forward. They can't extricate themselves from this state, regardless of what's said to them, so true is it that this is a horrible state, and I have to confess that I've never seen any that has shown me an image of hell more clearly than this one. What a wretched, deplorable state! To prefer to rely on one's own wretched brain and faulty judgment than to submit to what the Pope has ordained! I repeat once more, I don't think I've ever seen anything that has shown me such a clear image of the state of hell than this, except what I've seen happen to a person³ who was tormented by a certain state of depression that made her seem like a demon, the spirit of a demon from which, however, by the grace of God, she has recovered; but, in truth, it really took many prayers and pilgrimages before she did.

"Now, the means of preserving us from falling into such a misfortune are humility and submission of our judgment. If only God were pleased to bestow on the Little Company the grace of always tending toward this, toward self-contempt, and toward holy humility, which is Our Lord's own virtue! You see, my dear confreres, I'd like this Company in general and each member in particular to tend always to holy humility, to seek the means of attaining it, and to miss no opportunity to practice acts of it. O my God, would that Your Goodness might be pleased to grant the Company this grace

²Roger du Plessis, Duc de Liancourt, and his wife, Jeanne de Schomberg. Both were outstanding for their piety and good works. They eventually allied themselves with the Jansenists.

Jeanne de Schomberg, daughter of Maréchal Henri de Schomberg, was a pious, talented woman. She aided Louise de Marillac considerably in her charitable works, encouraged the zeal of Adrien Bourdoise, and took under her patronage the Daughters of Providence. Pascal, Arnauld, and Le Maître finally succeeded in winning her and her husband over to Jansenism. She died in the Château de Liancourt on June 14, 1674, at the age of seventy-four.

³Saint Vincent is very likely thinking of Claire-Marie Amaury who, at the time of this ordeal, was a Visitation nun in the First Monastery in Paris.

and to give it this spirit, the spirit of holy humility, the characteristic virtue of Your well-beloved Son! Let's ask this grace of His Divine Majesty, Messieurs, in our prayers and meditations, and as we come and go. In a word, let's never weary of asking Him for it."

167. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

June 17, 1657

"God be praised!" said M. Vincent, repeating these three words four or five times in succession because M. Coglée,² one of the priests of the Company, said in his Repetition of Prayer that he had spent very little time reasoning during his meditation and had devoted himself mainly to affective acts. M. Vincent praised highly this manner of acting, and said, "That's what we should do during meditation—that is, we should spend very little time looking for reasons. We should rather make acts of the love of God, humility, contrition, etc. For why should we reason when we're already convinced about the subject of our meditation? Oh, how I wish the Company would adopt this practice of following at once the inspirations God has given us, and not abandon them to waste time searching for motives, which are useless then because we have no need of them! Today, let's ask God for this grace, namely, to pray well. Let's say to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, teach us to pray as

Conference 167. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 55 v°.

¹*Subheading:* Waste no time reasoning during meditation; change of residence for the Genoa Missioners; omit no sacrifice for the welfare of souls.

²Mark Cogley (Saint Vincent spells his name *Marc Coglée*), born in Carrick-on-Suir, Lismore diocese (Ireland), on April 25, 1614, was ordained a priest on May 30, 1643, and entered the Congregation of the Mission the following July 24. In a period of distress and discouragement, he had the good fortune to meet Gerard Brin, a fellow countryman, who induced him to remain in the Congregation. After giving him time to make up his mind definitely by spending some time in the Internal Seminary (novitiate), Saint Vincent sent him to Sedan (1646), where he took his vows on December 13, 1649; the following year he was named Pastor of the parish and Superior of the house. Replaced in 1654 by Jean Martin, he resumed the same functions in 1655 and kept them for another year. For a few months in 1659 he was Superior of the Annecy Seminary; from there he returned to Saint-Lazare.

we ought.' I ask the priests to pray for this grace for the Company today at Mass; and the clerics, Brothers, and novices to do the same at Holy Mass and Communion; and let their second intention at Communion be to obtain this grace from God for the Little Company.

"I recommend to the prayers of the Company our confreres in Genoa. They have a great deal to suffer now because they've had to leave their own house and rent another one in order to give over their home to the plague-stricken. The wear and tear of moving was all the greater because they had only one week to do it. Yet, by the grace of God they're enduring this in the right spirit, and happy are they to suffer for the people—for God, in the first place, and then for the people. You see, my dear confreres, we should all be so disposed and have this desire to suffer for God and our neighbor and to wear ourselves out for that purpose. How happy are they to whom God gives such dispositions and desires! Yes, Messieurs, we must be all for God and the service of the people; we have to give ourselves to God for that, wear ourselves out for that, and give our lives for that, strip ourselves naked, so to speak, in order to be clothed with Him—at least, we should desire to be so disposed, if we aren't already—we should be ready and willing to come and go wherever God pleases, whether to the Indies or elsewhere; lastly, to devote ourselves willingly to the service of our neighbor and to extend the empire of Jesus Christ in souls; and I myself, old and infirm as I am, must, nonetheless, have this disposition, even to go to the Indies to win souls to God there, although I were to die on the way or on board ship; for, what do you think God asks of us? Our body? Oh, not at all! What then? God asks for our good will, a firm, genuine disposition to seize every opportunity of serving Him, even at the risk of our lives, to have and to foster within ourselves this desire for martyrdom, which God sometimes accepts as willingly as if we had actually suffered it. And, in fact, we see that the Church has such esteem for this that it considers as martyrs those who have been exiled for the faith and died in exile.

"How well versed in this sort of suffering are our confreres in Warsaw, Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy! There they are, in the midst of war, plague, and famine, yet they remain firm and steadfast.

In the letters I've received from both of them (for both have written to me), I see nothing but an admirable strength and firmness in these two servants of God. Reflect a little on this poor, worthless Company and the grace God has granted it, seeing it composed of such members, so constant and faithful in suffering for the love of God and for the people. May His goodness and infinite mercy preserve for the Company these faithful servants of His!"

168. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 10, 1657²

"We can tell which men make their meditation well, not only from the way they share it but even more from their actions and behavior, in which they show clearly how they've benefitted from it. The same must be said of those who make it poorly, so much so that it's easy to see that the former make progress and the latter fall back. Now, to benefit from our meditation, we have to prepare ourselves for it, and those who neglect this preparation, coming to meditation only through habit and because the others do it, fail greatly. *Ante orationem praepara animam tuam*, says the Wise Man³: 'Before going to meditation, prepare your soul'; for meditation is a lifting of the mind to God to explain our needs to Him and to implore the help of His mercy and grace. So, it's quite reasonable that, since we have to deal with such a lofty, sublime Majesty, we give a little thought to what we're about to do, before whom we're going to present ourselves, what we want to say to Him, and what grace we should ask of

Conference 168. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VII, sect. I, p. 60.

¹Subheading: Meditation.

²The editor of Abelly's *Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, published in 1891, provides this date. We are unable to locate the document he had in hand enabling him to interpolate two long passages into Abelly's text, those from "So now, this is what we have to do" to "the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and the saints," and from "In closing, let's thank God" to the end of the text. Quoting from a Latin poet, so contrary to the practice of Saint Vincent, instills some doubt about the authenticity of these additions.

³Cf. Sir 18:23. (NAB)

Him. Nevertheless, it often happens that laziness and cowardice prevent us from thinking about all that; or else, just the opposite, haste and thoughtlessness distract us from it, causing us to slip into that lack of preparation. This has to be remedied. We must also be careful to keep our wandering imagination from running wild, and watch over the flightiness of our poor mind in order to maintain it in the presence of God, without, however, trying too hard, for going to extremes is always harmful. Meditation has three parts; we all know its order and method and must be faithful to it.

“So now, this is what we have to do: first of all, place ourselves in the presence of God, considering Him either as He is in heaven, seated on the throne of His majesty, from where He looks on us and contemplates all things; or in His immensity, present everywhere, here and elsewhere, in the highest heavens and in the lowest part of the abyss, reading our hearts and penetrating even the most secret folds of our conscience; or in His presence in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar: ‘O Savior, here I am, a weak and miserable sinner, here I am at the foot of the altars on which You repose; O Savior, may I do nothing unworthy of this holy presence;’ or, lastly, within ourselves, pervading us entirely and dwelling in the depth of our hearts. And are we going to ask ourselves if He’s there; who can doubt it? The pagans themselves said, *Est Deus in nobis, sunt et commercia caeli in nos; de caelo spiritus ille venit*.⁴

“We don’t question ourselves on this truth. *Tu autem in nobis es, Domine*.⁵ Nothing is more certain. It’s very important to make this point clearly and to place ourselves firmly in the presence of God, for the very gist of meditation depends on it; once that’s done, the rest falls into place.

“Let’s ask God to give us His grace so that we’ll be able to converse properly with His Divine Majesty, acknowledging that of ourselves we can do nothing, and entreating this of Him through His

⁴*God is within us, and the heavenly communications are in us; that spirit comes from heaven.* Dodin, *op. cit.*, p. 367, notes that Ovid (*Art d’aimer*, Livre III, V, 549-50) has something similar: *Est Deus in nobis et sunt commercia caeli. Sedibus aetheris spiritus ille venit.*

⁵*You are within us, Lord.* Cf. Jer 14:9. (NAB)

great love for us, His infinite merits, and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and the saints.

“The subject is something either tangible or intangible; if it’s tangible, such as a Mystery, we have to represent it to ourselves and be attentive to all its parts and circumstances; if the matter is intangible, as a virtue is, we must give careful consideration to seeing in what it consists and what are its principal attributes, as well as its distinctive features, its effects, and especially its acts and the ways to put it into practice. It’s also well to seek the reasons prompting us to embrace this virtue and to reflect on the reasons that affect us more. They may be drawn from Holy Scripture or the holy Fathers; and if we recall during meditation certain passages from their writings on this subject, it’s well to ponder them in our minds; but we shouldn’t seek them out or even concentrate on many of these passages; for what good is it to dwell on a large number of passages and reasons, unless it’s to enlighten and refine our understanding? That’s more like doing a study of them than praying. When we want a light, we use a flint; we strike it and, as soon as the material that has been prepared has caught fire, we light the candle; once the candle is lit, it would be ridiculous for us to continue to strike the flint. In the same way, once a soul is sufficiently enlightened by considerations, what need is there to look for others and to strike and continue to strike our mind in order to multiply reasons and thoughts? Don’t you see that it’s a waste of time and that you must strive at that time to inflame your will and stir yourself up to affections by the beauty of the virtue and the ugliness of the contrary vice? That’s not difficult, since the will follows the light of understanding and is led to do what’s suggested to it as good and desirable.

“That, however, is still not enough: it doesn’t suffice to have good affections, we must go further and be motivated to take resolutions to work seriously in future for the acquisition of the virtue, proposing to ourselves how to put it into practice and doing acts of it. This is the crux of the matter and the benefit to be drawn from meditation. That’s why we mustn’t take our resolutions lightly, but repeat them and really plant them firmly in our heart. It’s even a good idea to foresee the obstacles that may arise and the means that can help us to

adopt this practice and to determine to avoid the former and embrace the others.

“Now, to do that, it’s neither necessary nor often advisable to have lofty sentiments about the virtue we want to embrace, nor even to desire to have those sentiments; for the desire to make the virtues—purely spiritual qualities—tangible may sometimes be harmful and upset the mind, and too much exertion of the understanding heats up the brain and causes headaches. The same is true for acts of the will too often repeated or too violent; they exhaust and weaken the heart. We must moderate ourselves in everything, and going to excess is never praiseworthy in anything whatsoever, especially in meditation. We must act moderately and tranquilly and always preserve peace of mind and heart.

“In closing, let’s thank God for the lights and graces He has granted us during meditation, and for the resolutions He has inspired us to take; let’s also ask Him for His help so that we may be able to put into execution as soon as possible whatever we have proposed to ourselves to do.

“Blessed be God! That’s it for now. *Or sus*, let’s all of us really devote ourselves to this practice of meditation, since through it all good things come to us. If we persevere in our vocation, it’s thanks to meditation; if we succeed in our works, it’s thanks to meditation; if we don’t fall into sin, it’s thanks to meditation; if we remain in charity, if we’re saved, all that is thanks to God and to meditation. Just as God refuses nothing in meditation, so he grants almost nothing without meditation: *Rogate Dominum messis*;⁶ no, nothing; not even the spread of his Gospel and what concerns His glory the most. *Rogate Dominum messis*. But, Lord, that concerns You and is up to You. No matter! *Rogate Dominum messis*. So then, let’s ask God very humbly to help us to adopt this practice.”

⁶Ask the Lord of the harvest. Cf. Mt 9:37-38. (NAB)

169. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 24, 1657

M. Vincent, speaking on the sufferings of this life and especially of those of the sick, told us, after commending good M. Duperroy to the prayers of the Company, that the latter was now in the hands of the surgeons, to be treated for a disease resulting from a second attack of the plague, which left him with some infected ribs. They had to be cauterized, yet he endured all those pains with such patience that he was scarcely heard to complain.

“As I was reflecting on the treatment with which God is pleased to try this servant of His,” he said, “I said to myself ‘Is that, Lord, the reward You give to Your servants, to this man in whom we’ve never noted the slightest fault, to someone who remained firm as a rock in the place where Your Divine Providence had placed him, despite all the calamities of war, plague, and famine?’ Yet, see how God treats His servants. Oh, we really have to say, my dear confreres, that God takes wonderful pleasure in seeing the suffering of a soul who endures it patiently for love of Him!

“Yesterday I saw a young woman who has been ill for months but suffers with such great patience that, to see her, to look at her face, you’d say that she’s not suffering anything because she looks so happy, yet her illness is very serious, and she has a constant headache. She’s a young woman who left a religious Order on account of some infirmity or other. But I declare to you, Messieurs, that I seemed to see a sort of radiance on her face which made me realize that God was dwelling in that suffering soul. Just think how pleasing this state is to God, since His own Son willed that all the holy and heroic actions He practiced in His lifetime should be crowned

Conference 169. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 56 v^o.

¹*Subheading:* Illness of Nicolas Duperroy; value of suffering in a spirit of faith; the blessed in heaven see the good works their dear ones do on earth.

by suffering!² He did this by giving His life for us all. Oh, what a blessed state is that of suffering for God!

“Three, four, or five days ago I was in a room paneled entirely with mirrors, so that, wherever you turn, all you see is mirrors, and you can’t do anything that wouldn’t be seen and reflected in those mirrors—not even lifting a finger—for those mirrors reflect the slightest action. Seeing that, I said to myself, ‘O my God, if by means of this glass, which is only a product of earth, for glass is made of sand and pebbles dissolved by means of a certain root, if, I say, we see by means of these mirrors even the slightest action done in this room, what do not the blessed see in God, who fills all things and in whom all things are contained!’ That’s how it is with all the good deeds of the faithful, all those acts of patience, of conformity with the good pleasure of God, and of so many other acts of virtue. All that, I repeat, even the slightest action, especially acts of virtue, is seen in God by the blessed. That’s why Saint Augustine says that one of the consolations God gives to the blessed in heaven who have friends and relations here on earth is to let them see the acts of virtue they practice, for instance, the intention we have in making our meditation, fervor of spirit, external decorum, even the smallest virtuous action we do; and they look upon the pains which those suffering souls, attached to the Cross, endure for the love of God, as so many precious stones that reflect a certain brilliance.”

²Abelly (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. VI, p. 51) renders this passage as follows: “How pleasing it is in His eyes, since His own Son willed to crown the heroic actions of His holy life with extraordinary sufferings that caused Him to die.”

170. - ILLNESS OF NICOLAS DUPERROY

[Around August 24, 1657]¹

“One of those two² (priests) is suffering from a troublesome stomach ailment, resulting from a wound from the plague that was poorly treated. I’ve just heard that they cauterized the tip of one of his ribs, which was infected, and he’s so patient that he never complains; he bears everything with great peace and tranquility. Someone else would be distressed to find himself ill three or four hundred leagues from home; he might say, ‘Why did they send me so far away? Why not get me out of here? *Quoi!* Do they intend to abandon me? Others are living comfortably in France, and I’m being left to die in a foreign land.’ That’s what a man who is merely human would say, a man who’d cling to his natural sentiments and wouldn’t adopt those of our suffering Lord, whose happiness was in suffering. Oh, what a beautiful lesson this servant of Our Lord teaches us so that we might love all those states in which Divine Providence may be pleased to place us!

“As for the other,³ you see how long he’s been working with marvelous peace of mind and trust in God, without growing weary of his prolonged labors, or balking at inconveniences, or being surprised at dangers. Both of them are indifferent to life and death and humbly resigned to whatever God will ordain in their regard. They show me no sign of impatience or murmuring; on the contrary, they seem disposed to suffer even more.

“Have we reached that point, my dear confreres? Are we ready to endure the trials God will send us and to stifle our natural impulses so as to live only the life of Jesus Christ? Are we prepared to go to Poland, to Barbary, or to the Indies, to sacrifice our lives and satisfactions to Him? If so, let’s bless God. If, however, on the con-

Conference 170. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. X, pp. 193ff., excerpt.

¹Might not this instruction be the development of the first part of the Repetition of Prayer of August 24, 1657? Whatever the case, its date is not far from it.

²Nicolas Duperroy, a Missioner in Poland.

³Guillaume Desdames, another Missioner in Poland.

trary, there are some who are afraid to leave their comforts, who are so soft as to complain when they lack the slightest thing, and so fastidious as to want a change of house or ministry because the air isn't good there, or because the food is poor, or because they're not free to come and go as they please; in a word, Messieurs, if some of us are still slaves to nature, addicted to the pleasures of the senses, like this wretched sinner who is speaking to you and who, at the age of seventy-[seven],⁴ is still absolutely worldly, let them consider themselves unworthy of the apostolic state to which God has called them, and let them be filled with shame to see their confreres exercising it so worthily while they're so far removed from their spirit and courage.

"What have they suffered in that country? Famine? It's there. The plague? Both of them have had it, and one of them has had it twice. War? They're in the midst of armies and have passed through the hands of enemy soldiers. In short, God has tried them by every form of scourge. And here we are, like homebodies without courage or zeal! We'll see others risking their lives in dangers for the service of God, and we'll behave like cowards! What a pity! What weakness! Twenty thousand soldiers are now going off to war to endure every kind of suffering there, where one will lose an arm, another a leg—and many their lives—for a little pride and very uncertain promise, yet they have no fear and don't fail to run to it as if in pursuit of a treasure. But to win heaven, Messieurs, scarcely anyone does anything; often those who set out to win it lead a life that's so base and sensual as to be unworthy not only of a priest and a Christian, but even of a sensible man; if there were such men among us, they'd be only carcasses of Missioners. *Or sus*, my God, be forever blessed and glorified for the graces You've given those who abandon themselves to You; may You be Your own praise for having given those two spiritual men to this Little Company.

"Let's give ourselves to God, Messieurs, to go throughout the world to carry His holy Gospel and, wherever He may lead us, let's stand by our post and observe our practices until it's His good plea-

⁴Abelly wrote "at seventy years of age"; the original text surely had "at the age of seventy-seven." (Cf. conf. 157, November 2-3, 1656.)

sure to withdraw us from it. We mustn't let difficulties shake us; the glory of the Eternal Father and the efficacy of the Word and Passion of His Son are at stake. The salvation of nations and our own is so great a good as to deserve to be won at any cost; it doesn't matter whether we die sooner or later, provided we die arms in hand; we'll be all the happier for it and the Company will be no poorer, for *sanguis martyrum semen est Christianorum*.⁵ For one Missioner who has given his life for the love of God, the goodness of God will raise up many others to do the good he will have left undone.

“Let each one of us, then, resolve to combat the world and its maxims, to mortify our flesh and our passions, to submit to God's orders, and to wear ourselves out in the duties of our state and the accomplishment of God's Will in whatever part of the world God pleases. Let's make this resolution now all together, but let's do it in the spirit of Our Lord, with perfect assurance that He'll assist us in time of need. Aren't you willing to do this, my brothers of the seminary? Aren't you, my brothers who are students, also willing? I'm not asking this of the priests for no doubt they're all disposed to do so. Yes, my God, we all want to correspond with Your plan for us. This is what all of us in general and each one in particular intend to do, with the help of Your holy grace. We will no longer have any attachment either to life or health, to our comfort and amusements, to one place or to another, or to anything in the world that could hinder You, my God, from granting us this mercy, which all of us ask of You for one another. I don't know why I said all this to you, Messieurs; I never had any thought of it, but I was so moved by what was said and, on the other hand, so consoled by the graces God has bestowed on our priests in Poland that I let myself go so far as to pour out the feelings of my heart into yours in this way.”

⁵*The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.* Taken from Tertullian's *Apologeticus* as published in Migne's *Patrologia latina*, I, 535.

171. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 25, 1657

Our blessed father began this talk by recommending to the prayers of the Company our Missioners in Genoa, saying that he had received no news of them, the reason being that “there’s no favorable occasion of writing now, since trade between that city and the others has been suspended because of the plague, which is raging there. Are they dead or alive? Whatever their state, I recommend them to your prayers and ask the priests who aren’t obligated to celebrate Mass for another intention to do so for that little family, and I ask our coadjutor Brothers to remember them at Holy Mass and in their Communions.

“I also recommend to the Company the men who are in Madagascar. We heard that a ship arrived in Nantes, but, since we’ve had no further news or letters, we’re waiting to learn the state of our confreres in that country. Are they dead? Are they alive? We don’t know. Whatever their state, let’s pray for them. And even should it be true that they’re dead, should we, on that account, abandon that work, that land which they and those who preceded them have begun to clear? *O Jésus*, no! We have to be careful not to do that! *‘Mais quoi,’* someone may say, ‘doesn’t it seem as if God no longer wants to make use of us, either there or in Genoa, since He permits so many and such good workers to die in those places? *Quoi!* The Company is still only in its cradle, and nevertheless God is allowing so many and such good workers to die!’ My dear confreres, let’s not be surprised at that; on the contrary, let’s be consoled to see that God is pleased to treat the Company as He treated the Church in the beginning, when it was just coming into existence. Oh, how wonderful are the ways of God and how incomprehensible they are to us! We see that the Son of God himself was the pillar of the Church. And yet, see how the Eternal Father wills Him to die. What does

Conference 171. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 57 v°.

¹*Subheading:* Prayers for the Missioners in Genoa and Madagascar; courage to continue the mission despite difficulties; letter from the Queen of Poland.

Our Lord do? He chooses certain people, the Apostles, to establish the Church throughout the world. And then God wills that those Apostles, who were the support of that same Church, should die, and all of them be martyrs; and after them He raises up others. On seeing that, people might have thought that God intended to abandon the Church and leave it in total ruin; but it's just the opposite, for the blood of Christians has been the seed of Christianity throughout the world and we count about thirty-five Popes who were all martyred one after the other. You'd see one put to death today; the next day there would be another. One is beheaded and then God raises up another, and another, and then another presents himself! And that, Messieurs, is how God acted in the beginning of the Church. Please consider that conduct of God who established and strengthened His Church by the destruction, so to speak, and the ruin of those who sustained it and were its principal supports.

"I'm telling you this, brothers, to prepare you to receive whatever news may come, with conformity to God's good pleasure, and so that you may not be surprised if we're told that all our men in Genoa are dead, and all those who were in Madagascar are dead, and so you won't come to think that Genoa and Madagascar should be abandoned. *O Dieu*, not at all! We must take great care not to abandon them but, on the contrary, that must be a reason for our not doing so, since this is how God acted in the establishment of His Church, and because it's a sign, since His Divine Majesty acts that way, that He wants to establish His Church still more firmly in those places.

"I likewise recommend to your prayers our good M. Desdames, that fine servant of God, who has suffered so much. Shall I tell you that the Queen of Poland² has done me the honor of writing to me in her own hand? Here's her letter; there's no harm in reading it to you; what you'll hear will console you."

M. Vincent had the letter read by one of our coadjutor Brothers. In that letter, written last July, Her Majesty tells M. Vincent of the generous deeds and acts of heroic virtue practiced by that servant of God M. Desdames.

²Louise-Marie de Gonzague. The letter mentioned here is not extant.

When the letter had been read, he said, addressing the Company, “Isn’t that marvelous? What do you think, Messieurs? What do you think, Brothers? Please reflect a little on the worth of a man animated by the Spirit of God. What does he not do? *Or sus*, God be praised! On the one hand, we have good reason for grief and, on the other, good reason for consolation. Today we learn that the Company has received some slight in a certain place—some embarrassment, for example—and tomorrow we’ll hear that, in another, God has worked wonders through it. We’ve just learned from Piedmont, for instance, that God is giving such a blessing to the missions our confreres are giving there that, unable to provide for all the people who come to them in droves, they’ve been forced to take along with them whatever secular priests they could find; but, since the latter are still not sufficient in number, they’ve even had to have recourse to members of religious Orders.”

172. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 30, 1657

“I recommend to the prayers of the Company our ailing confreres, M. Almérás and those who have gone to take the waters with him.² I also recommend once again the Genoa house; we’ve had no news of it for a very long time. M. Martin, who’s in Turin, sends me two items of news: first, that the Senate of Genoa ordered the inhabitants of a town in the State of Genoa, near Turin called, . . .³ to send

Conference 172. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 58 v^o.

¹*Subheading:* Ravages of the plague in Genoa; death at sea of Mathurin de Belleville and of Claude Dufour and Nicolas Prévost in Madagascar; courage needed to continue to evangelize that island; reproofs to a loose-living, tactless priest.

²In a letter to Jean Martin on April 28, 1657 (cf. VI, 309), M. Vincent reported that René Almérás had gone to Bourbon-l’Archambault, a spa noted for its thermal springs and radioactive waters used by those suffering from rheumatism. On August 20, 1657, the saint wrote to Guillaume Delville (VI, 424) that Hugues Perraud, Jean Watebled, and Jacques Éveillard had all returned there with him to take the waters for their various ailments.

³The name of the place was left blank.

provisions to Genoa, and they sent a boatload. Since the men in charge of steering the boat dared not come near the city of Genoa for fear of the plague, they fired a shot from a cannon to inform the citizens that they should come and take what was being brought for them, but no one came. Seeing this they drew close to shore, placed the provisions on the ground, and fired another warning shot, but no one budged. This led them to believe that the desolation in that city was very great. They left the provisions there and returned to their own town to reload their boat and sail back to Genoa.”

M. Vincent added that he found out that the first rains that fell have greatly lessened the contagion, that the air is somewhat purified, and that people are beginning to open their shops. “But,” he said, “Turin is so far from there that this rumor isn’t very certain. Be that as it may, let’s pray for them, in whatever state they are, and especially for the poor little family in this sorely afflicted town.

“I was telling you the other day that a ship had arrived at Nantes from Madagascar, one of the three that had gone there, and that we still had not yet received any letters. I’ve received one, not from Madagascar, but only from Nantes, written by a good young man named Baudouin⁴ who stayed here for awhile but left because of financial difficulties. He’s in the Nantes seminary. When this man heard that a ship had arrived, he went to look for the Captain, who had gone to call on Maréchal de la Meilleraye, and asked him for news of the outcome of the voyage and, among other things, for news of the Missioners. The Captain, however, was unwilling to tell him anything, wanting, first and foremost, to give an account of the voyage to the Maréchal. Seeing that he could get nothing from the Captain, he went looking for another sailor, who gave him a lot of details, and, among other things, told him of an accident that had happened to a good priest, an able man who had even previously been in the army, and whom the Maréchal was sending to Madagascar. This priest had gone on the ship’s deck and fallen overboard. When people heard his cries, everyone came running; several

⁴Daniel Baudouin, born in Montrelais (Loire-Atlantique), Nantes diocese, in 1633, entered the Congregation of the Mission as a clerical student on October 7, 1651, took his vows in 1653, and renewed them on January 25, 1656.

jumped into the water to save him, but in vain; and nothing more was learned of him except that he was battling the waves and crying out: 'Jesus, have pity on me! Holy Virgin, help me!'

"That happened the second day after they had set sail. This led those on the ship to think that they wouldn't have a prosperous voyage. Since this same M. Baudouin wanted to find out news of the Missioners, he asked about them. The seaman told him that the three who had sailed on their ships were dead; that M. de Belleville⁵ died en route to Cape Verde and was buried at sea, which is the cemetery of those who die there; that there was a high mortality rate on the ships and a large number of sick people, whom our Missioners had carefully attended; that Messrs. Dufour⁶ and Prévost⁷ had reached Madagascar, but M. Dufour had fallen into a river while he was crossing it. He had been pulled out alive, and, although those who were with him told him he should change his clothes and linen so as not to fall ill, he refused, saying that it would be weakness to change and that he'd be all right. Shortly afterward, however, he came down with chills and died from them as a result. He was buried on the seashore at the foot of a cross which he had himself planted on top of a little rise.

⁵Mathurin de Belleville, born in Brix (Manche), entered the Congregation of the Mission on May 1, 1654, at twenty-seven years of age. He contracted an illness as soon as the ship left the Saint-Martin roadstead, died on January 18, 1656, and was buried off the coast of Sierra Leone (cf. *Notices*, vol. III, p. 160). On September 7, 1657, Saint Vincent gave a conference to the confreres on his virtues (cf. conf. 173).

⁶Claude Dufour, born in Allanche (Cantal) in 1618, entered the Congregation of the Mission on May 4, 1644, shortly after his ordination to the priesthood. He was first sent to Montmirail (1644), then put in charge of the seminary in Saintes (1646-48). He was very virtuous but of a rigid and unobliging kind of virtue. In his eyes the life of a Missioner was too soft; he persuaded himself that the life of a Carthusian was more suited to his love for prayer and mortification. Saint Vincent was of an entirely different opinion, so Dufour, always docile, abandoned his plans. To free him from temptations of this kind, the Saint put him on the list of priests to be sent to Madagascar. While awaiting the day of departure, the saint assigned him first to Sedan, then to Paris, entrusting him with the Internal Seminary there during the absence of M. Alméras, and finally to La Rose as Superior (1654-55). Sea voyages were long in those days; Dufour left Nantes in 1655 and arrived in Madagascar in August of the following year, but died on August 18, 1656, just a few days after his arrival. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 14-23.)

⁷Nicolas Prévost, born in La Roche-Guyon (Val-d'Oise), entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 20, 1646, at thirty-four years of age. He was sent to Madagascar in 1655 and died there in September 1656, leaving the reputation of being a very zealous and virtuous Missioner.

“As for M. Prévost, he was so grieved by the death of M. Dufour, of whom he was very fond, that he also died shortly afterward; so, the only survivor now is good M. Bourdaise, who has been blessed by God both as far as the spiritual matters with which he’s entrusted are concerned, and also for the care he takes of temporal matters in the Fort, where he’s loved by everyone, and that he acts with prudence and great discretion; he has charge of all the French who are there and of the new converts. That’s how matters stand.

“Someone in the Company may say perhaps that Madagascar should be abandoned; flesh and blood will use that language and say that no more men should be sent there, but I’m certain that the Spirit says otherwise. *Quoi!* Messieurs, shall we leave our good M. Bourdaise all alone there? The death of those priests will, I’m sure, astonish some. God led 600,000 men out of Egypt, not counting women and children, with the intention of bringing them into the Promised Land; yet of all that great host only two entered it—not even Moses, the leader of them all. God has called our confreres into that country, and yet some die on the way, and others shortly after arriving there. At this we must bow our heads, Messieurs, and adore the wonderful, incomprehensible ways of Our Lord. Weren’t they called to that country by God? Who can doubt it? All three of them asked me several times to go there. M. Dufour had that desire from the time we began to talk about Madagascar; that, along with the circumstances and special considerations that occurred in his regard, led us to believe that God had called him there. And how many times did our poor deceased M. Lambert⁸ ask me to let him go! It wasn’t flesh and blood, as you can imagine, that led them to risk their lives as they did. Judge now whether the Company has a vocation from God for that land, whether it has been called to go there; we have no doubt about that, Messieurs, for we weren’t even thinking about Madagascar when the proposal was put to us. Here’s how the whole thing happened:

“The members of the Company of the Indies of this city, that is, those gentlemen who had formed a group to trade in Madagascar,

⁸Lambert aux Couteaux.

had sent a secular priest there, but, because he didn't behave properly, they thought they might do better if, by approaching the Papal Nuncio in this city,⁹ they might get some priests of a religious Order who were men of exemplary life. They did so and spoke to him about it; and that good Prelate, thinking over and over again of whom he could give them for that, cast his eyes on the poor Little Company and advised those gentlemen to speak to us about it, telling them that, for his part, he would consult us on the matter, but he thought the Company would agree to do it and make a success of it. Those gentlemen came here to speak to us about it; the Nuncio also spoke to us and even begged us to do it. We called together some of the senior members of the Company and, in short, it was decided to undertake this ministry. We picked two of the best subjects of the Company, our dear deceased Messrs. Nacquart and Gondrée, for that purpose; the former was an admirably prudent and discreet man, who had an apostolic spirit and excellent judgment; the other man was also very virtuous and very humble and gentle. The members of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith sent us the necessary faculties and even praised the Company's zeal. Now, this is the Congregation that has authority to send men to these missions, for the Pope, in whom alone resides power to send missionaries throughout the whole world, has given it power to do so. Bishops have jurisdiction only over the territory and within the confines of their archbishoprics or bishoprics, but this Congregation has authority from the Pope to send missionaries throughout the world, and it's sending us.

“Now, I ask you, isn't that a true vocation? *Eh quoi*, my dear confreres! After knowing that, could we possibly be so base and unmanly as to abandon this vineyard of the Lord to which His Divine Majesty has called us merely because four, five, or six men have died? And tell me what a fine army it would be if, because it lost two or three, four, or five thousand men—as they say happened at the lat-

⁹Nicolò di Bagno (Saint Vincent refers to him as *Nicolas Bagni*), Archbishop of Athens, Nuncio in France from June 25, 1643 to 1657, was made a Cardinal with the titular church of San Eusebio, and Bishop of Senigallia on April 9, 1657. He died in Rome on August 23, 1663, at the age of seventy-nine. Saint Vincent, with whom he had a close relationship, was very pleased with his benevolence.

est siege of Normandy—it would abandon everything! What a nice sight an army of runaways and poltroons like that would be! Let's say the same of the Mission; it would be a fine Company of the Mission if, because five or six had died, it were to abandon the Lord's work! What a cowardly Company, attached to flesh and blood! Oh, no! I don't think there's a single member of the Company who has such little courage, or who isn't ready to go to take the place of those who have died. I don't doubt that nature may tremble a little at first, but the spirit, which has the upper hand, says, 'I'm willing; God has given me the desire to go; no, this loss can't make me abandon my resolution.'

"You know about the shipwreck that occurred last All Saints' Day in the great river of Nantes. M. Herbron wrote¹⁰ telling me that he has to confess that this disaster caused his heart to be slightly discouraged but that, taking heart again, and reason regaining the upper hand, he had cast aside all fear and was ready to set sail, if that was what I wanted. M. Boussordec also writes that he's ready; and our poor Bro. Christophe,¹¹ that dear boy, wrote so ingenuously that I was deeply touched while reading his letter. He tells me that he often asks God to grant him the grace of doing His holy Will, and sometimes asks himself, 'Where would you love the Will of God better, here or in Madagascar? And I confess to you, Monsieur,' he writes to me, 'that I think I'd love it better in Madagascar than here.' Moreover, risking one's life to cross the seas for the sole love of God and the salvation of our neighbor is a kind of martyrdom because, even if a person is not actually martyred, at least he has the will to be so, since he leaves everything and exposes himself to I know not how many perils. And as a matter of fact, saints who have died in exile, where they were sent for the sake of Our Lord Jesus Christ, are regarded by the Church as martyrs.

"Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Felix. While he was being led to martyrdom, a certain Adaucte, who is also a saint and martyr, saw Saint Felix being led away. He ran to embrace him and, having

¹⁰This letter is not extant.

¹¹Bro. Christophe Delaunay.

learned the reason why he was being led to death, began to say to those who were taking him, 'If you intend to put this servant of God to death because he's a Christian, so am I, and you have just as much reason to put me to death as you have to put him.' So he refused to be separated from Felix, followed him at once, and was martyred with him. And how many times have we not seen the jailers who kept God's servants locked up become converts themselves to the religion of the Christians and Catholics whom they kept in confinement!

"They've written to me from Rome that five or six French priests, who were at the ordination here, went to Rome to throw themselves at the feet of the Pope and offer to minister in the Indies, and that the Pope praised their zeal, saying to them, 'I'd like to be able to do the same; formerly, before becoming what I now am, I had the urge to request that, but what prevented me were some words I had read in a book by Blessed Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva: ask nothing and refuse nothing.'

"The Pope himself, as you've just heard, praises the plan of those French priests who had the courage to go and offer themselves to His Holiness for this purpose. *Or sus*, Messieurs, on our part let's give ourselves wholeheartedly to God and offer ourselves to Him for whatever ministries in which His Divine Majesty may be pleased to engage us. Let's not be cowards any longer.

"Alas, my dear confreres! What should distress us the most is not seeing that God takes His servants the saints to himself in this way, but rather to see that among our own priests there's someone along with me—yes, someone along with me—who gives scandal to the Company. O my dear confreres, what a source of affliction for the Company to see this! Only rarely does he come to meditation, especially for some time now; he does nothing all day long but come and go through the cloister, through the dormitory; if anything is missing from the rooms of others, it can be found in his. In short, he leads a deplorable life. It's for such persons, Messieurs, that we should feel distressed, they're the ones for whom we should pray. *O mon Dieu! O mon Dieu! O mon Sauveur!*"

M. Vincent concluded this talk by saying that, in order to be in conformity with the Church, we should still pray for those dear de-

parted men, even though there might be reason to believe they're among the blessed.

173. - THE VIRTUES OF MATHURIN DE BELLEVILLE

September 7, 1657

At this conference on the virtues of the late M. de Belleville, priest of the Company, of whom we've already spoken, and who died on the voyage to Madagascar, our Most Honored and blessed Father, speaking after two of our scholastics, who reported what they had noted on the virtues of this good deceased confrere, including, among others, humility, gentleness, cordiality, mortification, self-contempt, and zeal for souls, said that what our Brothers had just stated was true and was what he had always noted about that good departed man. He then added that M. de Belleville was a man of gentle birth from Normandy, who had become a priest before joining the Company and, even though he had not been in the Company very long, he was sent to Madagascar because he had seemed to him (M. Vincent) to be very virtuous. He had earnestly begged to be admitted into the Company, which accepted him because of his great devotion and humility, despite his lack of learning.

From this, M. Vincent took the opportunity to encourage those in the Company who had difficulty understanding philosophy, theology, and the other sciences, saying that those who found themselves in such a state should take courage and hope that Our Lord would make up for this in other ways and that, as a rule, He makes use of insignificant people to do great things. He noted that there were several men in the Company whom they had been reluctant to admit, but who are very good members today. Some among them are Superiors who govern their little family with great prudence and

gentleness. So, there's good reason to praise God and to admire, in this respect, His ways of acting with them.

M. Vincent then said, addressing mainly the priests and those whose duty it was to guide and direct those who make spiritual retreats here in this house, "Take care, Messieurs, you who guide the retreatants, not to advise them to enter the Company but only to accompany them in their good intentions and help them to decide where they feel God is calling them. Let's allow God to act, Messieurs. Up to the present, by the mercy of God, this is how we've acted in the Company; and we can say that, until now, there has been nothing in the same Company unless God put it there. We haven't asked either for houses or establishments but have tried to correspond with God's plans, and when He has called us to this place or that, to this ministry or that, we've tried to go there and, on our part, to cooperate as much as we could.¹

"Messieurs, in the name of God, I beg of you, let's be steadfast in that and let God act, being content to cooperate with Him. Take my word, Messieurs, if the Company does this, His Divine Majesty will bless it. So, let's be content with the persons God will send us. If we see that they're thinking of going to some place else rather than to the Company—I mean to some holy Community or Order—let's not keep them from it; otherwise, there would be great reason to fear that God might punish the Company for wanting to have what He doesn't will it to have. Now I ask you, if the Company didn't have the spirit I just mentioned—which is not to want to have any other persons, no matter how intellectually gifted they may be, but the ones God is pleased to send it; and who have had this desire for a long time—would the Carthusian Fathers and the Fathers of Sainte-Geneviève have sent us, as they're doing, numbers of young men who were thinking of becoming Carthusians or Canons Regular? They'd certainly have done nothing of the kind. *Quoi!* Take, for instance, the case of a young man who's thinking of becoming a Carthusian; he's sent here to converse with Our Lord by means of a retreat, and you might try to persuade him that he should remain

¹The preceding passage, from "but only to accompany them in their good intentions," is given quite differently by Abelly (*op cit.*, bk. I, chap. XXXIV, p. 159).

here because perhaps he's a gifted young man! Messieurs, what's that if not to want to have what doesn't belong to us, trying to make a person enter a Company where God doesn't want him, where God hasn't called him, and about which he had no thought? And what else is that but to bring God's displeasure on the Company? O poor Mission! O poor Little Company of the Mission! Into what a pitiable state you'll fall if you come to that! Let's ask God, Messieurs, let's ask God, Brothers, to reinforce the grace He's given the Company until now of not wanting anything but what He wills it to have, and of not taking on ourselves any ministry whatsoever, but waiting for the call of His Divine Majesty."

Then, getting back to the good departed M. de Belleville, M. Vincent said that he had an authentic account of what had taken place during his illness and at his death, written by the late M. Dufour, who has since died in Madagascar. He read part of it, but stopped when the bell rang for retiring, and ended the conference by reciting the *De Profundis*, for the repose of the soul of the dear departed.

174. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

September 23, 1657

At Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent said, among other things, that we should have great confidence in God and have frequent recourse to Him for, he said, what else are we but sin, filth, and nastiness? He took the opportunity to say this because, when a scholastic made his Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent saw that he had not had sufficient recourse to God, had spent too much time in reasoning, had not shown enough love of virtue, had not prayed enough, and had not had recourse to God in his meditation.

Conference 174. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f^o 62 v^o.

¹Subheading: Deaths in Genoa

Then he added, “Speaking of confidence in God, we have good reason to ask Him to fill the Company with this virtue for the reason I’m about to tell you. His Divine Majesty has finally taken from us that great, holy man M. Blatiron, of whom you’ve so often heard me speak. That apostolic man, by whom God has wrought such great things, is no longer with us. God has taken him from us. We no longer have good M. Duport² either, nor good M. Tratebas, nor several others. Well, I’m not going to tell you how many of our men have died, but rather—and this can be done more quickly—I’ll tell you how many are still alive, assuming that God hasn’t called them to himself since the news we had from Rome, because we’ve had no news from Genoa for about two months. Messrs. Simon and Le Juge are still alive.³ M. Le Juge has had the plague but, by the mercy of God, has recovered. He’s a good Italian priest. There’s still an Italian priest at the seminary along with three clerics, including, I think, Bro. Pinon.⁴ So there are four remaining in the seminary, supposing that nothing has happened to them since the latest news we’ve had, as I’ve just told you. As for the coadjutor Brothers, one has died,

²Nicolas Duport, born in Soissons (Aisne) on March 22, 1619, was ordained a priest on June 15, 1647, entered the Congregation of the Mission on May 5, 1648, and took his vows on May 6, 1650. He was assigned to Genoa in 1652, where he died of the plague on July 14, 1657. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 82-87, for an account of several Missioners who died of the plague in Genoa that year.) A brief summary of Duport’s virtues is given in MS. 774 of the municipal library of Lyons (f° 232-33).

³René Simon, born in Laval (Mayenne) on September 21, 1630, entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 5, 1650. He was a professor at Saint-Charles Seminary, then a missionary in Poland, where he was ordained a priest in 1654. He returned to France the next year, took his vows on January 25, 1656, and was sent to Genoa. Simon became Superior of the Annecy Seminary in 1663 and of the Turin house (1665-67). He was named Secretary General in 1668 and, after participating in the General Assembly of that year, was appointed Superior in Rome and Visitor of the Province of Italy. In 1677 he was recalled to France; the following year he was made Superior of the Cahors house, where he died in 1682 or shortly thereafter. Simon was very useful to the Congregation, especially because of the favors he obtained for it from the Holy See. His biography was published in *Notices*, vol. II, pp. 447-51.

Girolamo Giudice (Jérôme Lejuge), born in Diano, Albenga diocese (Italy), on September 30, 1611, was ordained a priest on December 22, 1635, entered the Congregation of the Mission on March 25, 1650, and took his vows on September 30, 1652. The terrible epidemic of 1657 that killed almost all the men in the Genoa house brought him to death’s door (cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 82-87). His self-sacrifice was admirable, but his character was difficult. He died on October 16, 1665.

⁴Pierre Pinon, born in Tours on June 19, 1630, entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 30, 1655, and took his vows in Genoa on October 14, 1657, in the presence of M. Simon.

and there are three left, including Bro. Rivet.⁵ And that, Messieurs, is how God has been pleased to afflict the Genoa house by means of the plague.⁶

“M. Blatiron, ah, what a loss! This man, whom we’ve seen here, was a pillar of the infirmary for the space of three or four years; yet you know what he’s done, what and how many conversions God has brought about through him—even of bandits! It was unheard of for bandits to be converted; yet there have never been so many conversions since the Priests of the Mission have been in Italy. Bandits are robbers who live in the woods; they committed some crime in their village or town and then fled to the woods. So, those priests had scarcely gone to give a mission in a certain hamlet or village close to the woods than some of those bandits were converted and reconciled with the relatives of those whom they had killed, and so were their relatives; all this came about through the mission. At the present time God is bestowing so many and such great blessings on the work of those priests in Turin that it’s truly wonderful. I’ve been told that they’re going off to open the mission in a town in the territory of the Mme Royale.⁷ There are many noblemen and many disorders and factions in that town. The Mme Royale did all she could to establish order there, but hasn’t yet succeeded, despite all the means she’s used until now. Finally, someone said to her ‘Madame, if you want to remedy this, Your Highness must send the Priests of the Mission to preach the mission there. Even some of the nobles themselves in that town are requesting the mission.’

“Now, to get back to our good M. Blatiron, he was a man who never stopped working. I’m amazed how he was able to keep it up. He was a priest whose very look inspired veneration and respect for him. I assure you, Messieurs, that, when I looked at him, I felt within me a certain respect and reverence for this man of God.

⁵Jacques Rivet, coadjutor Brother, born in Houdan (Yvelines) on September 11, 1620, entered the Congregation of the Mission on December 16, 1641, and took his vows on April 22, 1646. His brothers, François and Louis, were both Priests of the Mission.

⁶Abelly provides a very different version of this passage (cf. *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. V, sect. II, p. 48).

⁷A dependency in Bra, Piedmont, of Christine, Duchess-Regent of Savoy and sister of Louis XIII of France.

“And what shall we say of Messrs. Duport, Ennery,⁸ and Tratebas, whose work was being so greatly blessed by God? Let’s not only talk about the good they did but any harm they did as well; have you ever noticed any of that in those servants of God? I, for one, confess I never noticed or heard of any. *Or sus*, let’s ask His Divine Majesty to be pleased to dispose others to take their place. Alas! where shall we find another M. Blatiron? Another M. Duport, or M. Ennery, or M. Tratebas? May the Goodness of God himself be pleased to choose the persons He desires to send in their place and to animate them with the same spirit! Confidence, Messieurs! Let’s have great confidence in God! I trust that He’ll help us and grant us the grace to correspond with His plans for the Little Company. I’d like to hope that not a single one of its members isn’t ready to go if asked to do so. By the grace of God, some have already volunteered, even some from outside this house who have written to me about it, and I’m sure at the mere word *vade*, they’d set off immediately.

“*Or sus*, I praise God for the grace He’s given this Little Company to be so disposed, for I’d like to hope that each and every one of us has the same disposition, and that, if someone came and said to us, ‘Come here,’ or ‘Go there,’ we’d be ready to obey. God be praised!

“I ask the Company, in the first place, to thank God for the graces He gave to those good departed men, and, in the second place, we’ll ask this same Lord that if, by chance, any of them are still in purgatory, He’ll deliver them from it by His holy mercy.”

⁸John Mc Enery (Saint Vincent refers to him as *Jean Ennery*), born at Castle Mc Enery, today Castletown (Ireland), in December 1616, entered the Congregation of the Mission on September 23, 1642, and took his vows on October 11, 1645. According to Saint Vincent, he was “a wise, pious, and exemplary man” (cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. V, sect. II, p. 48). He taught theology at Saint-Lazare (1652), aided the unfortunate people of Champagne impoverished by the war (1653), and assisted his countrymen who had fled to Troyes (1654). His last assignment was Genoa, where he died of the plague in 1657.

175. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

November 1, 1657

After Most Honored Father had two or three members of the Company make repetition on the thoughts God had given them in meditation, he told the Company that it should raise its mind and heart to God on this holy day of All Saints to ask for His grace and to pray for the needs of each one in particular and of the Company in general. “You see,” he said, “on this day Our Lord is accustomed to pour His graces in greater abundance on the faithful who ask Him for them in the way they should. He does so through the intercession of all the saints; for, since we have more intercessors before God, we must have no doubt that the graces He pours forth on the faithful on this day are more abundant than on the other special feast days of the saints.

“So that, my dear confreres, is what we have to do, that is, to thank His Divine Majesty for all the gifts and graces He’s been pleased to grant all the saints in general who are now in heaven, and to each of them in particular, for the good use they’ve made of those same graces and for their perseverance in the practice of good works until the end. We should thank God for all that because they practiced so well the first lesson Our Lord taught them and us: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.’²

“O beautiful and holy humility, how pleasing You are in the eyes of God, since Our Lord Jesus Christ willed to come down to earth expressly to teach it to us both by word and example! O my dear confreres, would to God that the love and desire of this virtue were deeply engraved in our hearts! Yes, the love of our own abjection, a willingness to be mocked and have little value set on us, to be considered of little importance, and to have the world look on us as ignorant men lacking virtue and fit for nothing.

Conference 175. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 63 v°.

¹*Subheading:* Feast of All Saints; humility; death of Dermot Duggan.

²Mt 5:3. (NAB)

“Not only must each member of the Company love that in his own regard, but he must also love it in what concerns the Company in general. Yes, to love that people speak of us as the least useful and most imperfect Community in the Church of God; to love that people say that it’s the most ignorant and good for nothing. That’s the road the Son of God willed to follow; He was taken for a seducer by the people; He allowed Barabbas to be preferred to Him; He accepted being looked on as someone possessed by the devil and to be rejected by the people. In short, He accepted and loved that state. Since it’s a fact that the Son of God loved that state, why shouldn’t we also love it? You see, we must always strive to love abjection and the shame that comes to us because of our faults. We must hate and detest evil when it goes as far as sin, and do our best to mend our ways. But once sin has been committed, we must love the shame that comes to us from it and be quite content to be despised because of it.

“I knew a good young woman,³ who had one thigh twice the size of the other; because of that she was unable to go, like others, into society, to the ball, etc., so she withdrew from the world to live in solitude and never marry. After that, she used to say, ‘O my blessed leg, the reason for my withdrawal from the world, O lovable source of shame that has procured for me so great a benefit!’

“Last evening I was reading a letter about our good departed M. Duiguin,⁴ in which I was told that his death moved everyone to tears, seeing that they were losing their good father (as they considered him). Great and small alike were all in tears. Indeed, he was their father, because he had begotten them in Jesus Christ. At first, that might give the Company some reason to think well of itself; but what we have to do in these circumstances is to say, as soon as we see and hear such things, ‘To You, Lord, be the glory! To You, my God, all the glory!’ And in this way we put down in ourselves anything that might elicit thoughts of foolish vanity in regard to ourselves in particular or the Company in general. May God be pleased

³Isabelle du Fay.

⁴Dermot Duggan.

to grant the Company the grace to strive especially and above all for the means of acquiring this holy virtue of humility and self-abjection! Yes, my dear confreres, I repeat, we should run after the acquisition of this virtue of humility. May His Divine Majesty be pleased to grant us the grace to do so!”

176. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

November 11, 1657

When our Most Honored Father had one of our scholastics make repetition, the latter happened to say that it wasn't enough to do all God asks of us, but we should do it for love of God. Then M. Vincent spoke, saying to that good Brother, “Brother, you've just said something that ought to be weighed and pondered, and I ask God to bless you. In fact, my dear confreres, it isn't enough to do what God asks of us, but we should, in addition, do it for love of God; to do the Will of God, this same Will of God, and to do it according to His Will, that is, in the way Our Lord did the Will of His Father when He was on earth. For example, we priests celebrate Holy Mass because it's the Will of God; now, it's not enough to do the Will of God by celebrating it, but we also have to strive to offer this same sacrifice to God with the greatest perfection in our power, in accord with the Will of God himself, just as Our Lord on earth offered the bloody and unbloody sacrifice of himself to His Eternal Father. We must strive, as much as we can, Messieurs, to offer our sacrifices to the Eternal Father in the same spirit Our Lord did, as I've just said, and to do it as perfectly as our poor, weak, wretched nature may allow us. The same holds for our Brothers who hear Holy Mass; it's not enough for them simply to hear it and, by so doing, to do the Will of God, but they also have to do the same Will of God by hearing Mass

Conference 176. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 64 v°.

¹*Subheading:* Follow the Will of God in all things for love of God; zeal of Jean and Philippe Le Vacher, Missioners in Barbary.

devoutly, attentively, and with a pure intention. It's the same for works—I mean, good works—such, for example, a person does who keeps his Rule well; keeping the Rule well is one thing, but that doesn't suffice if it's not done for love of God.

“So you see that everything we do or suffer, if we don't do it or suffer it for love of God, is useless for us; even should we be burned alive or give all our possessions to the poor, says Saint Paul, if we don't have charity and don't do or suffer for love of God, then all that is useless for us.² For example, assisting poor slaves is a very excellent ministry, and there are even a few Orders in the Church which have always been esteemed and respected above others because they are dedicated to that, such as the Order of the Redemption of Captives,³ whose members take the vow, among other vows, of offering themselves as slaves in place of those who might be tempted to apostatize, in order to free them from the danger of losing the faith.

“That's beautiful and most excellent, Messieurs; but I think there's also something more in those who not only go off to Algiers and to Tunis to contribute to the ransom of poor Christians there, but who, besides that, remain there to ransom those poor men, to assist them corporally and spiritually, to hasten to fulfill their needs, and to be there at all times to help them. O my dear confreres, do you really reflect on how great this work is? Do you see it clearly? I ask you, is there anything more in harmony with what Our Lord did by descending here on earth to redeem us from the captivity of sin and the devil? What did the Son of God do? He left the bosom of His Eternal Father, His place of rest and glory, and to do what? To come down here on earth among human persons, in order to instruct them by His words and examples, to set them free from the captivity in which they were, and to redeem them. To do this, He even gave His own blood. Therefore, Messieurs, we must not hold on to anything whatsoever—our ease and comfort. Let's leave everything to serve God and the neighbor. Nature demands only change; and if we let

²Cf. 1 Cor 13:1-13. (NAB)

³Order of Mercy; also known as the Mercedarians.

ourselves believe her, she would constantly try to convince us to change; but we have to resist. I admit that this takes a lot of strength.

“Look at M. Le Vacher the elder,⁴ who’s in Tunis. What work do you think he has on his hands now? When there were two of them, they could scarcely keep up with what had to be done; and now he’s all alone, in charge of the consulate that he has to run and, on the other hand, he has the care of the poor slaves! Nature would try to get rid of this burden, but we have to hold fast and brace ourselves against it, remaining wherever God has placed us, in any ministry and in any country whatsoever.⁵

“And,” he added, speaking of M. Philippe Le Vacher, who had been back from Algiers for about two months and was getting ready to return there,⁶ “are you well aware that he spends seven or eight nights a year without sleeping, in order to hear the confessions of the poor slaves, whom he goes to find in the places where they’ve gone to rest, spending entire nights with those poor men, who have no other time but that to go to confession, for their masters are unwilling to let them leave their work during the day? That’s what the Consul has informed me several times, advising me that, if I didn’t make him moderate his night watches, it’s to be feared that he might break under the load. Now, I ask you not to mention this to him and not to tell him I said this about him. Perhaps it’s wrong of me to tell you that; *mais quoi*, how could I not talk about good when I see it, when, on the other hand, I can’t help mentioning evil when I notice it and say, ‘You’ve committed such and such a fault.’⁷

“*Or sus*, may God be blessed and ever glorified! The kingdom of God suffers violence and only the violent bear it away, those who practice virtue in the midst of great difficulties, suffering and enduring the most for love of God; and that’s what God wants of us.

⁴Jean Le Vacher.

⁵*In the margin*: “M. Vincent probably wanted to encourage M. Philippe Le Vacher who would soon be ready to return to Algiers.”

⁶*In the margin*: “He is speaking here of Philippe Le Vacher, who had just left this Repetition of Prayer.”

⁷*In the margin*: “M. Vincent recalled a passage from one of the Prophets about seeing the enemy and crying out against them. Cf. Ez 33:3. (NAB)

May the Divine Majesty be pleased to grant all of us the grace to do His holy Will always and in all things!”

177. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

November 25, 1657

When M. Vincent had a priest, recently admitted to the Internal Seminary, make Repetition of Prayer, the priest, speaking of the Company, referred to it as the *holy Company*, the *holy Congregation*. On hearing that, M. Vincent interrupted that good priest and said, ‘Monsieur, when we speak of the Company, we mustn’t use language such as the *holy Company*, the *holy Congregation*, or other similar, exalted terms, but rather *the Company*, *the Little Company*, and the like. In that way we’ll imitate the Son of God who called the Company of His Apostles and disciples *the little flock*, *His little Company*.² How I wish that God might be pleased to give this insignificant Company the grace of being firmly established in humility, of being based and built on this virtue, and of remaining in it as at its post, within its framework; for, look, Messieurs, let’s not deceive ourselves; if we don’t have humility, we have nothing. I’m not speaking only of external humility, but principally of humility of heart and of that which leads us to believe sincerely that there’s no one on earth more despicable and wretched than ourselves, that the Company of the Mission is the most insignificant and wretched of all Companies, and to be quite content that the world speaks of it in such terms. Ah, Messieurs! What is that desire to be esteemed? Isn’t it unbearable pride to want to be treated differently from the Son of God? What did people say of the Son of God when He was on earth? And how was He willing to be regarded

Conference 177. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 66.

¹*Subheading:* Humility in speech; good example to be given by the first members of the Congregation; prayers for Toussaint Bourdais in Madagascar.

²Cf. Lk 12:32. (NAB)

in the mind of the people? As a fool, a rebel, a stupid person, and a sinner—although He wasn't so—even to the point of willingly allowing Barabbas, a thief and a wicked man, to be preferred to Him. O my Savior, how Your holy humility will confound sinners like me, a wretched man, on Judgment Day!

“Let's be careful of that, my dear confreres! Those of you who give missions and you who speak in public, watch out! Sometimes, and often enough, we see people deeply moved by what has been said; we see everyone crying; we find others, who, pushing to the front, go so far as to say those words, ‘Blessed is the womb that carried You and the breasts at which you nursed.’³ We've sometimes heard similar words spoken. On hearing that, nature is pleased and vanity is generated and nurtured, unless we suppress all those vain satisfactions, renounce vanity, renounce ourselves, and seek purely the glory of God, for whom we have to work, you see; yes, purely for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. To act otherwise is to preach to ourselves and not to others, and a person who does this—I mean who preaches to be applauded, to be esteemed in order to be praised, to be talked about—what does that person, that preacher, do? What does he do? He commits a sacrilege, yes, a sacrilege.

“O my God, my God, grant this poor Little Company the grace that not a single one of its members will fall into this misfortune. You see, my dear confreres, take my word for it, we'll never be fit to do God's work if we don't have profound humility and self-contempt. No, if the Company of the Mission isn't humble and doesn't have the belief and conviction that it can do nothing worthwhile and is more apt to spoil things than otherwise, it will never do much; but, when it possesses and lives in the spirit I just mentioned, then you can rest assured, Messieurs, that it will be fit to do the work of God because God makes use of such subjects for His great works.

“In explaining today's Gospel, which speaks of ten virgins,⁴ five foolish and five wise, some theologians feel that this parable should be interpreted with regard to religious Orders and Commu-

³Cf. Lk 11: 27. (NAB) *In the margin*, “Quote here the Latin of the passage.”

⁴Cf. Mt 25: 1-13. (NAB)

nities that have withdrawn from the world. If that's the case, Messieurs, if half of the religious Orders and Communities are lost, alas, what do we not have to fear! And what should I not fear, I, a wretched man and an old sinner who never did anything good on earth? *Or sus*, my dear confreres, let's take courage and not lose heart, let's give ourselves wholly to God, renouncing ourselves, our satisfactions, and our ease and comforts, believing that we have no greater enemy than ourselves, and doing all the good we can.

"And there are two things to be considered here, namely, not only to do good, but to do it well. For you see, it's not enough to do good, to give alms, for example, to fast and so on; all that is good, but it's still not enough; we must, in addition, do it in the Spirit of Our Lord, in the way Our Lord did it on earth, and purely for the glory of God. Plants don't bring forth better fruits than their species. We, each and every one of us, are like the species of those who will come after us and will most likely not produce better fruit or become more perfect than we do. If we've done well, they'll do well; for you see, Messieurs, that will pass from one to another: those who remain teach others how the first members practiced virtue and carefully observed the Rules; and those others will teach yet others who will come after them, aided by the grace of God, merited for them by the first members—yes, merited by the first members. How is it that we see certain families in the world leading such good lives in the fear of God? I have one in mind among others; I knew the grandfather and the father, both very upright men, and today I know their children, who are the same. How is this? It's because their fathers merited this grace for their children by their good, holy lives, in accord with the promise of God himself that He will reward the virtue and good, holy lives of fathers in their children even to the thousandth generation.

"Let's look at the other side. We see people, a husband and wife, who are upright and lead a good life; yet everything disintegrates in their hands; they succeed at nothing. Why is that? It's a punishment from God because of some serious sin committed by their parents and passed on to their children, according to what is written, that God will chastise the sinner in his children even to the seventh

generation.⁵ Even though this is to be understood principally of temporal possessions, nevertheless we can understand it also of spiritual goods. So, if we do well, if we're exact in keeping our Rules, if we practice well all the virtues proper to a good Missioner, we'll merit this grace from God for our children, that is, for those who will come after us, and they'll do good. If, however, we do evil, it's greatly to be feared that they'll do the same, and even worse, because nature always drags us down after herself and inclines us incessantly to evil. Then it will be said of the Company what is commonly said in the world, 'They're fading away, those people are fading away, that is, they're demeaning themselves.'

"You see, we can consider ourselves as fathers. The Company is still in its cradle; it's just been born; it's been only about twenty-five or thirty years since it began to live. What's that? Isn't that to be still in its cradle? And those who will come after us in three or four hundred years time will look upon us as their fathers. Even those who have just come are considered the first. Those in the early years are considered the forefathers. When you, Messieurs, want to support an argument with a passage from one of the Fathers of the first centuries, you say, 'This passage is given by a certain Father who lived in the first century or by a certain Father of the Church who lived in the early centuries.' That's what you say. In the same way, people will say of those now in the Company, 'This was done in the time of the first Priests of the Mission; that's what they did; such and such virtues were in force in it,' and so on.

"O Messieurs, since this is so, what example must we not leave our successors, our children, since the good they'll do depends in a certain sense on the good we practice! If, as the Church Fathers say, it's true that God shows fathers and mothers who are damned the evil their children commit on earth, so that their torments may be thereby increased, and that the more evil those children commit, the more the fathers and mothers, who are the cause of it by the bad example they gave them, suffer from it; so, too, on the other hand, as Saint Augustine says, God lets those fathers and mothers who are in heaven see

⁵Cf. Bar 6:2. (NAB)

the good done by their children who are still here below on earth, so that their joy may be increased by it. Likewise, Messieurs, what a consolation, what joy will we not experience when God is pleased to let us see the Company doing good, abounding in good works, observing the Rules faithfully and exactly, practicing the virtues that make up its spirit, and the good examples we'll have given them!

"O wretched man that I am, who talk and do not act! I tell others what they have to do, and do nothing myself! Pray for me, Messieurs, pray for me, Brothers, that I may be converted.

"*Or sus*, let's give ourselves to God then once and for all, let's work, let's work, let's go to the assistance of the poor country people who are waiting for us. By the grace of God, some of our houses are almost always at work—some more, some less—giving a mission here or there, going from this village to that, always at work, by the mercy of God.

"I remember—should I say this?—that, in the past, when I'd come back from giving a mission, it seemed to me that, when I reached Paris, the gates of the city were going to fall upon and crush me; and seldom did I return from a mission without that thought coming to mind. The reason was that I used to make this reflection: 'Here you are, going back to Paris, and other villages are waiting to receive from you what you've just given to this village or that! If you hadn't been there, it's likely that certain persons, dying in the state in which you found them, would be lost and might have been damned. If you've discovered that certain sins are being committed in such a parish, don't you have good reason to think that you'll find the same and other sins being committed in the neighboring parish? And yet they're waiting for you to go and do the same for them as you've just done for their neighbors; they're waiting for the mission, and you go off and leave them! Yet, if they die in their sins, in a certain sense you'll be the cause of their loss, and you ought to fear that God will demand an account of this from you.' Those, Messieurs, were the thoughts that occurred to my mind.

"Let's stop here. I recommend to the prayers of the Company good M. Bourdais, alone in Madagascar, that God may be pleased to strengthen him with His grace and preserve for the Company this

man blessed by God in the way you know, this man whom on various occasions we were on the point of dismissing because we felt he didn't have sufficient knowledge to remain in the Company! Oh, how good it is to hope in God and put our trust in Him!"

178. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

[1657 or 1658]

After M. Vincent had recommended to the prayers of the Community the mother of Jean and Philippe Le Vacher, Catherine Butefer, who had just died and was to be buried in the Church of Saint-Lazare, in accordance with her wishes, he added, "The reception of the body, the funeral service, and the burial of this good mother of such worthy children will soon take place. Among those children are, above all, the two who are priests in the Company, one of whom is there at the altar,² and the other is in Tunis,³ where he's doing so much good that it can't be expressed. He has marvelous talent for even temporal things.

"When a French Captain had captured a Turkish ship with one hundred fifty Turks on board, he brought them and the ship to Tunis to sell the whole lot there. Since he had to have the Consul's permission for that, M. Le Vacher, acting as Consul in the absence of M. Husson, who had returned to France, was summoned by the Captain to meet him on board his ship. He had him informed that the practice was for Captains to make the first visit personally to the Consul, who represents the King. So, the Captain came and, after a

Conference 178. - Manuscript life of Jean Le Vacher, p. 17. This Repetition of Prayer was given between August 30, 1657, date of the return of Philippe Le Vacher to France, and September 21, 1658, date of a document notarizing the death of Catherine Butefer (cf. *La famille de Jean Le Vacher*, Paris, 1907, p. 15).

¹*Subheading*: Death of Catherine Butefer, mother of Jean and Philippe Le Vacher; praise for Jean Le Vacher.

²Philippe Le Vacher.

³Jean Le Vacher.

long conversation, told him his plan. However, M. Le Vacher pointed out that everything belonged to the King, who had armed and provisioned him, and that such was the law of the sea.

“The other persisted, and M. Le Vacher insisted. Finally the Captain said he was going to do as he pleased. Gathering his interior courage, M. Le Vacher said to him, ‘Monsieur, you have your forces at hand; you may do as you please, but I, for my part, declare to you that I’ll never consent to it; on the contrary, I’ll oppose it by every means in my power. I’m bound to render this fidelity to the King.’

“When the other man saw this, he no longer dared to persist. And, what is more, when M. Le Vacher was dismissing him, he pointed out to him the means God had provided him to ransom so many unfortunate Christians, by handing over the slaves he had. I think he gave a third of the ones he had; in addition, he didn’t sell a single one.

“Now, just consider the courage and nobility of the son of such a good mother. Let’s offer all of them to Our Lord, along with the slaves among whom those two blessed children are ministering and devoting their lives.”

179. - DEVOTION OF JEAN LE VACHER TO THE SLAVES¹

[1658]

“I received a letter from M. Le Vacher, who is in Tunis, telling me that, when a galley from Algiers arrived at Bizerte, ten to twelve leagues from there, he didn’t know what to do because, as a rule, he goes to the slaves to console them not only spiritually but corporally as well. Since he had no money, he was very anxious as to whether or not he should go there because those poor people are greatly in need

Conference 179. - Manuscript life of Jean Le Vacher, p. 11.

¹It was in March 1658 that Saint Vincent learned of the financial obligations assumed by Jean Le Vacher in order to assist Bro. Jean Barreau, the consul in Algiers (cf. VII, 122).

of corporal, as well as spiritual, assistance and, as I've said, he found himself lacking all means of corporal assistance because he had sent all the money he had to the Consul at Algiers to free that good Consul from the torment of the flogging and tyranny he's forced to endure. Nevertheless, laying aside all this anxiety, he thought only of helping those poor convicts. He collected all the money he could, took with him an interpreter and another person to assist him, and set off. On his arrival, as soon as he could be seen from the galley from very far off and his clothing was recognized, those poor men began to burst into shouts of joy, crying out: 'Here comes our liberator, our pastor, our father!' When he boarded the galley, all those poor slaves threw themselves upon him, weeping with affection and joy at the sight of their corporal and spiritual liberator; they even went so far as to throw themselves on their knees, some catching hold of his cassock, others gripping his greatcoat, with the result that they tore it, so strong was their desire to get near him. It took him more than an hour to move through the galley in order to go to pay his respects to the Captain, because they were blocking his passage, and he couldn't advance amid all the applause and rejoicing of those poor men. The Captain ordered each one to take his post and welcomed that dear priest very courteously, telling him that he had great respect for the charity of Christians and the way they mutually helped one another in their afflictions. Next, good M. Le Vacher bought three of the fattest bullocks he could find, had them slaughtered, and distributed the meat to them. He also had a large quantity of bread baked and, in this way, gave those poor slaves a treat for their bodies, while he also did all in his power to provide them with food for their souls, which is much more necessary for the glory of God. He taught them the catechism, instructed them in the Mysteries of our most holy Faith, and, in a word, comforted them with the utmost charity. That went on for a week, to the great consolation and edification of those poor convicts, who called him their liberator, their consoler, the man who strengthened them spiritually and corporally. And so he left them, greatly consoled and strengthened in their faith, determined to endure their labors patiently for love of God.

“On his return to Tunis, the Dey, although an infidel, told him he was earning heaven by distributing so many alms. M. Le Vacher, trying to excuse himself, said that this had been done by means of the alms and charitable donations he had received. The Dey replied that he and those who had done that would gain heaven. *O Sauveur!* O Messieurs! What good a priest can do! You see that he’s the reason why infidels themselves respect our religion. When I asked his brother, M. Philippe Le Vacher, what the Turks thought of our religion, he told me that, with regard to spiritual things, they were too materialistic and were by no means capable of them, but that they honored and respected ceremonies and external observances, even going so far as to lend us their carpets for our feast day celebrations. *O Sauveur!* O Priests of the Mission! O all of us who belong to the Mission! We, too, can have our holy faith respected by living according to God and by imitating good M. Le Vacher. May the Divine Goodness be pleased to grant us this grace! O Savior! O Blessed Virgin! Ask this favor for us, ask for true purity for us, for the priests, for the students, for the seminarians, for the coadjutor brothers, and for the whole Company; this is the prayer we’ll now make.”

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